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**EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT IN QUALITY  
MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES:  
A CASE STUDY BASED ANALYSIS**

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**Thesis submitted to the University of Warwick  
for the degree of  
PhD in Industrial and Business Studies**

**September 1996**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have learnt much from working with Paul Edwards on this and a related study. His comments on my work have always been perceptive, constructive and swift, and I am thankful for his expert supervision. As second supervisor, Keith Sisson also commented authoritatively on every chapter, and I am grateful for his support, not only with my PhD but also in terms of encouraging and over-seeing my participation in other research projects whilst I was at Warwick. I am also indebted to John Geary, who - before taking up a post at University College Dublin - provided invaluable advice during the initial stages of the project, particularly concerning the delicate issue of negotiating case study access. Having secured access to four organisations, I owe a great deal to the many workers and managers who gave so freely of their thoughts and their time: thanks are due in particular to Tr  vor Bonam, Jeff Davis, Andy Lomas, and Paula Simmons. I am also grateful to my new colleagues at Kingston University for allowing me a generous amount of time and space to complete the writing-up of the thesis.

In the Summer of 1992 I was not at all convinced that becoming a student once more was the best option open to me. There are a number of people who I would not have met had I not studied at Warwick and moved to live in Leamington Spa for three-and-a-half years. Their continuing friendship is the main reason I am glad I made the decision that I did: they are Torben Andersen, Josic Cadoret, Xavier Collier, Noelle Donnelly, Tony Edwards, Steve Glenn, Jenni MacDuff, Sooki MacShane, and Guy Vernon.

The Industrial Relations Research Unit provided a stimulating intellectual environment in which to undertake doctoral research. I am grateful to the many other PhD students in the field of IR with whom I was able to share and discuss ideas: in particular Ali Buyukuslu, Mark Cully, Mark Gilman, Beverley Keith, Marek Korczynski, Anne McBride, and Chantal Rivest. I have fond memories of epic battles on the squash court with a number of other friends at Warwick: namely Francesco Curto, Rob Elder, Caroline Lloyd, Guy Lussier, Paul Marginson, and Rodrigo Martinez.

I would also like to thank my family for their support (Mum, Dad, Mark, Sonja, Nick, and Chrissie). And thanks for “being there” to: Brian Abbott, Mark Brown, Penny Browne, Yorgos Chouliarakis, Lucy and Ian Corry, John Dutton, Edel Edwards, Isabelle Endreo, Sally Gaden, Martine Gadille, Petra Garnjost, Ricky Haddock, Gill Holt, Katharine Holt, Tim and Anne Holt, Maria Hudson, Paul Hutchinson, Karen Jackson, Jackie Kerrigan, Guy Laborie, Evelyne Leonard, Swapan Mallick, Phil Miles, Alik   Mouriki, Athina Nicolaides, Luis Ortiz, Imma Pastor-Gosalbez, Steve and Clare Peet, Tine Pelsen, Jocelyne Pirdas, Javier Quantanilla, Margit Rapp, Georgia Redpath, Kristina Richmond, Sanjiv Sachdev, Paul Skeldon, Steve Tatlow, Marco Trentini, Theo Van Neerven, Dietmar Volkemer, Gordon Waters, Rupert Willis, Ton Wilthagen, and Raj Yagnik.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to Alice Holt, whose love, encouragement and humour made it all a lot easier.

C.R., Kingston-upon-Thames, September 1996.



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## CHAPTER ONE:

### INTRODUCTION

Quality management (QM) has without doubt been one of the leading management fashions of the 1990s. QM programmes derive from a growing belief during the 1980s that commercial success comes not simply from low cost competitiveness but from high and reliable quality. The aim is to foster the commitment of employees across the organisation to quality in terms of product and service delivery, and to create a culture of “continuous improvement”.

The subject of QM has generated a substantial body of literature. Much of this literature is highly prescriptive, concentrating on the constituent elements of the QM approach and the reasons it is deemed advantageous for employers. Far less attention is paid to the question of how such a strategy is perceived by *employees*, or to the nature and extent of the employee participation which is inherent in the QM philosophy. This study contributes to a redressing of this imbalance by focusing on the complexities of QM in practice, and by illuminating the real extent of employee participation and involvement in quality improvement initiatives.

The study is based around case studies of four organisations, all of whom have made a thorough corporate commitment to the principles and practices of quality management. It is concerned with the twin themes of management strategy and employee perceptions. In so far as issues of management strategy are concerned, some attention is given to the

prescriptive QM literature. However, the central focus of the study is on how quality management programmes are perceived by employees. As such, it engages more fully with the mainstream industrial relations literature in the area, as well as with issues arising out of “labour process” debates.

This introductory chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, some of the background to the development of QM is briefly described. A workable definition of QM is then presented. Thirdly, the available literature is categorised in terms of the various ways in which the implications of QM for employees are addressed. This leads into the final section, in which the distinctive theoretical position adopted in the research is outlined.

### **1.1 The Context of Quality Management**

One danger in examining a relatively new initiative like QM lies in divorcing it from other aspects of employee relations. The 1980s and 1990s have been marked by a wide array of workplace innovations. One reason for their often limited success is the assumption that they can be simply imposed on, or alternatively ignore, existing ways of managing employees. Moreover, the rhetoric of novelty notwithstanding, many initiatives depend on older approaches. Any new approach has to be examined in context.

In terms of the context of employee involvement techniques, the 1980s witnessed a de-emphasising of indirect forms (such as extended bargaining rights and worker directors). Instead, there was a growth in “softer” or more managerial techniques for engendering

employee commitment (such as profit-sharing, employee share ownership, communication and briefing systems, and quality circles). It is now widely accepted that the primary stimulus to these initiatives was declining productivity and competitiveness. Employers increasingly realised that mere compliance on the part of their workforces would no longer be sufficient to match competitors in terms of delivery, price and quality; rather, there needed to be greater employee commitment. In the search for means of improving employee performance, above all in terms of quality and flexibility, the focus was primarily on the work group or team. The early 1980s thus saw an explosion of management interest in quality circles (following earlier experience in the USA and Japan). Quality circles were initially hailed as a major innovation, and the quality circle “boom” is now often referred to as having represented a transitional period *en route* to more integrated methods of involving employees in quality improvement, such as QM (IDS, 1990; Ramsay, 1991).

QM typically purports to subsume quality circles and teamwork arrangements into a more integrated and strategic approach. It is in this way that it is often linked to the concept of “human resource management” (HRM), in which the objective is to maximise the commitment of employees through the adoption of organic and developed structures, in which the individual is encouraged to develop the habits of self-discipline and initiative (Sisson, 1994). However, the scope of initiatives which fall under the rubric of HRM has often been exaggerated, and the extent to which they are introduced as part of an integrated approach, rather than as essentially piecemeal reactions to changing economic circumstances, is also unclear. The third and most recent Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (WIRS) (Millward *et al.*, 1992) confirms that the main development in HRM-

style participation and involvement has been two-way communication. It was reported in 1990 that 45% of establishments had taken initiatives to increase employees' involvement in the operation of the establishment in this way in recent years, whereas the figure for 1984 was 35%. By comparison, initiatives in "delegative" participation (i.e. the extension of decision-making powers to individual employees or groups of employees) have been much less in evidence. For instance, the survey found that only 2% of workplaces had autonomous work groups in 1990, a similar proportion to that reported in the 1984 study.

Initially, teamworking in its more sophisticated form was largely confined to a small number of well-publicised companies established on greenfield sites. They included Rothmans, Trebor, Whitbread and Fisher Body (Atkinson and Meager, 1986; IDS, 1984), as well as Japanese companies such as Nissan, Komatsu, Hitachi and Matsushita, whose example is often seen as having inspired indigenous firms to follow suit (IDS, 1988). In recent years teamworking has spread to brownfield sites, although the number remains small. As regards the prevalence of quality circles, there is something of a conflict of evidence. There is broad agreement that there was a significant growth in the number of companies with quality circles in the early 1980s (Collard and Dale, 1989; IDS, 1985). However, whereas the 1990 WIRS survey found an increase in the second half of the 1980s, up from 0.5% in 1984 to 5% of manufacturing firms in 1990, other surveys (CBI, 1990) and commentators (Hill, 1991b; Marginson *et al.*, 1988; Oliver and B. Wilkinson, 1989) have reported a decrease.

As regards more general quality initiatives, in a more recent study involving 880 members of the British Institute of Management (Wilkinson, Redman and Snape, 1993),

no fewer than 71% claimed that their organisation had introduced a formal programme, and a further 11% that their organisation proposed to do so. The majority (61%) also confirmed that the initiative was relatively recent, i.e. in the last year (21%) or the previous five years (40%). The most widely quoted approaches involved the preparation of mission statements (66%), quality awareness training (62%) and customer satisfaction surveys (61%). As many as 42% claimed that their organisation was involved in a QM programme. However, only a small proportion (8%) claimed that QM had been a success. Other surveys too have reported widespread cynicism and the failure of quality initiatives to produce tangible benefits (cf. Binney, 1993; Economist Intelligence Unit, 1992; Kearney, 1992). Such judgements, of course, depend on what criteria for success are applied, an issue which is returned to at the end of the thesis.

QM needs to be located not only in the context of other innovations in the field of employee relations, but also in relation to both management and employee perceptions of corporate strategy more generally. It is very easy for managers to believe that major changes have been made and for workers to give a favourable response to a QM initiative, even though the wider views of both groups may be more sceptical. Moreover, as is well known, favourable first impressions can rapidly disappear.

As regards managers, their role has figured prominently in discussions of the success and failure of various quality improvement techniques. For example, line managers' fear that the extension and involvement of employees in decision-making procedures would threaten their traditional right to manage has been a prominent factor in explaining the failure of quality circles. Moreover, employees' suggestions for improving the manner in

which work is organised have not only been seen as a criticism of managers' performance, but also a potential threat to their future employment (Bradley and Hill, 1987; Collard and Dale, 1989). The question of middle management attitudes to QM is an important one. Evidence suggests that although employee involvement is certainly favoured by managers,

there remains a preference for schemes which are integrative and which do not directly challenge the managerial controlling function (Poole and Mansfield, 1992: 212).'

QM can also have serious consequences for other groups in the organisational hierarchy. Supervisory positions, for instance, may come under threat from the flatter organisational structure and simplification of grades that QM implies (cf. the "delaying" exercise at BA Engineering, reported in IRRR, 1993). Also, skilled and professional groups like engineers and accountants may perceive a threat to their occupational controls and specialist identities as QM exposes them increasingly to the regulation of production and new quality requirements. The fear of many middle managers must be that although QM may permit them increased involvement in decision-making procedures, it also allows their counterparts from other areas to interfere in what has been hitherto the preserve of their discretion (Geary, Rees and Sisson, 1995). Thus, as Geary has concluded,

while TQM may be appreciated by some managers as a way of extending their influence and encouraging more co-operation and teamwork, for others it may seem like an unwelcome encroachment which is as likely to give rise to new problems as resolve old ones (1993: 14).

Turning to employee perceptions, although there are undoubted benefits to be obtained from the increased involvement in problem-solving and decision-making that QM implies, there is substantial agreement that changes to production technologies - for



instance - have also been accompanied by certain undesirable effects (cf. Delbridge and Turnbull, 1992). The same consequences have been documented as arising from teamworking in Japanese companies (Oliver and B. Wilkinson, 1992; Williamson, 1989), as well as from multi-skilling and teamworking in office work (O'Connell Davidson, 1990). The flattening of job hierarchies, which is often associated with QM, has also been found to induce discontent among employees by removing promotion opportunities (Ahlstrand, 1990). Moreover, the greater employee involvement at the point of production or service delivery which is associated with QM does not usually replace traditional forms of control, but rather tends to co-exist alongside them. As an example, Nissan, a company which it is claimed has transformed the social relations of production by introducing teamworking (Wickens, 1987), nevertheless continues to maintain close forms of supervision (Storey, 1994).

As for employees' perceptions of QM in the context of wider management strategy, it has also been found that if employee participation initiatives are introduced without changes to other aspects of a company's personnel management policy, then they are unlikely to be viewed favourably by employees. For instance, in a study of one of Lucas' plants in Birmingham, Elger and Fairbrother (1992) found that, while employees welcomed teamworking, the lack of resources allocated to training prevented them from acquiring a wider repertoire of skills to rotate between work tasks within the manufacturing cell. There is also considerable agreement that employees' trust in management has not increased significantly as a result of moves towards more participative forms of work organisation. Rather, the "them and us" syndrome remains stubbornly persistent (Kelly and Kelly, 1991). Thus, in a number of detailed case study examinations of task

participation techniques it has been found that the difference in attitudes between those employees who do participate and those who do not is not significant (Bradley and Hill, 1983; Hill, 1991b). Geary (1994) also found that one unanticipated consequence of such groups was that employees' commitment and loyalty was directed inwards towards the immediate work team, and co-operation between work groups was prevented as a result:

Employees' favourable response to task participation has not been generalised to affect their wider relationship with management. The employment relationship continues to be characterised by mistrust (653).

The generation of sustained employee commitment to quality principles, although clearly far from straightforward, remains one of the central aims of any quality improvement strategy. Before defining QM more closely, it is useful to clarify the nature of the employee participation which such strategies seek to realise. This can be done by locating QM in the context of the broader participative mechanisms which exist across Europe (cf. Rees, 1994).

Although the extent to which different EC member states have adopted statutory systems of employee participation varies considerably, the majority have legislated to establish either works councils or employee representation on company boards, or both. Certain member states, however, rely on an essentially voluntarist approach to employee participation, involving minimal legal intervention, and this approach is exemplified by the United Kingdom, where there is no statutory employee participation machinery.

It is useful to distinguish not only between "statutory" and "voluntary" participation as above, but also between "indirect" and "direct" participation. Whilst statutory legislation

tends to focus on indirect or “representative” participation - that is, on the procedures through which workers are collectively represented in decision-making processes - UK management appears overall to be more concerned with “direct” forms of participation. These are usually introduced by management, and involve individual employees taking part directly in decision-making at the level of the workplace. Taking these two analytical distinctions together allows four different types of employee participation to be delineated: (i) statutory indirect participation (principally the statutory requirement for works councils across most EC member states and for worker directors in a sizeable minority); (ii) voluntary indirect participation (such as collective bargaining and joint consultation committees along UK lines); (iii) statutory direct participation (more unusual, but includes - for example - a Dutch regulation on consultation in small companies and the French law on compulsory profit-sharing); and (iv) voluntary direct participation (the principal focus of this study, taking the form of - for example - briefing groups, quality circles, teamworking, two-way communication, and QM programmes).

In summary, then, having described the different forms of employee participation across Europe, it is clear that in the British context the principal form of participation afforded by QM is “voluntary direct participation”, which can be defined as

opportunities which management provide, or initiatives to which they lend their support, at workplace level for consultation with and/or delegation of responsibilities and authority for decision-making to their subordinates either as individuals or as groups of employees relating to their immediate work task, work organisation and/or working conditions (Geary, Rees and Sisson, 1995: 1).

The key element within this definition is the emphasis on the role of management. QM may well offer employees “empowerment” and increased involvement in decision-

making. As we will see throughout this thesis, however, management control the limits of that discretion and autonomy, perhaps increasingly strictly:

With this conceptualisation, task participation is rendered timeless. What may be new now is that management are increasingly adopting new work organisation strategies, with greater urgency than heretofore, and are defining the terms of its implementation and operation .... Task participation is used thus as a means of generating employee commitment, motivation and co-operation. It is an effort on management's part to gain employees' active consent and to persuade them to work hard and diligently (Geary, 1994: 637 and 638).

## **1.2 Defining Quality Management**

One of the fundamental problems in the discussion of QM is the apparent lack of a generally accepted definition of what it actually is. There are almost as many definitions of quality management as there are books on the subject. The following definition of TQM from the introductory chapter of one of the leading management textbooks is a fairly typical example:

Put simply, TQM is the mutual co-operation of everyone in an organisation and associated business processes to produce products and services which meet the needs and expectations of customers. TQM is both a philosophy and a set of guiding principles for managing an organisation (Dale, Boaden and Lascelles, 1994: 10).

The difficulty of defining QM precisely is compounded by the ever-expanding vocabulary of buzz-words which pervade the quality management discourse, many of which the author of the same textbook believes are interchangeable:

There is no difference between TQC [total quality control] and TQM and the reader should treat them as the same .... [Moreover] the concept of TQC .... readily translates to "total quality commitment" or "total quality care" (Dale, 1994: 80).

What *is* clear is that QM is not a specific institution or practice which an organisation does or does not possess. There was a tendency in early discussions to develop from the prescriptive management texts a benchmark of the “true” QM company. Empirical research then found that even firms which seemed at first sight to be QM organisations did not meet the ideal standard. It is thus important to see QM as an approach with several aspects and variants, rather than as a simple structure which does or does not exist within an organisation. For this reason, the acronym “QM” is used throughout this study, since this provides for a broader and more generic conception of quality initiatives than does the more popular term “TQM” (total quality management). Moreover, although all four of the case study organisations in the study have some kind of definable quality management strategy in place, only one subscribes to the banner headline of TQM.

Although this study is not based on one universal model of QM, it is nevertheless useful to sketch out a broad conceptualisation of the key elements that a QM programme is likely to consist of. Hill and Wilkinson (1995) refer to the three fundamental principles of TQM as: (i) customer orientation; (ii) process orientation; and (iii) continuous improvement:

These principles are implemented in a specific manner and the mode of implementation is itself one defining feature of TQM. Implementation is by means of appropriate improvement tools, measurement systems, and management and organisational processes (9).

More specifically, Mohrman *et al.* (1995) refer to two main “clusters” of practices associated with TQM:

The first cluster constitutes a set of core practices which are deployed by both service and manufacturing firms: quality improvement teams and councils, cross-functional planning, direct employee exposure to customers, process

simplification, re-engineering, and customer satisfaction measuring. The second cluster is composed of production-oriented practices deployed primarily in manufacturing settings or in administrative and service settings characterised by routine processing work. It includes just-in-time deliveries, work cells, statistical process control, and self-inspection (28).

This two-fold definition mirrors closely the conceptualisation of QM used here, which essentially involves seeing QM in a generic fashion as representing a “commitment to quality principles”, and as being made up of two interdependent and yet distinguishable parts. These are firstly what can be termed “hard QM”, namely production-oriented techniques such as: (i) task-based teamworking; (ii) just-in-time production (JIT); and (iii) total quality control (TQC). And secondly “soft QM”, which consists of: (i) the use of HRM-style personnel policies in order to generate commitment to quality; and (ii) a management ideology that reinforces the maxims of cultural change, continuous improvement and customer satisfaction. QM thus

comprises both production-oriented and employee relations-oriented elements, and this highlights the tensions between, on the one hand, following clearly laid-down instructions whilst, on the other, encouraging employee influence over the management process (Wilkinson *et al.*, 1992: 6).

This categorisation of the different aspects of QM usefully overlaps with the now much discussed distinction between hard and soft approaches to HRM, hard stressing the control and utilisation of a resource, and soft the development of skills and commitment (cf. Legge, 1995). It is important to note that the hard and soft aspects of QM do not represent a unified paradigm, since there is considerable variety of practice, and developments are highly contingent upon specific contexts. Consequently, the relationship between the two dimensions should be seen as complex and interdependent.

The main implications of “hard QM” for the nature of employee involvement arise from the fact that its implementation will often require significant changes in production methods, with consequent implications for the organisation of work tasks. Take, for example, task-based teamworking, the objective of which is “functional” or “task” flexibility. This entails the use of a flexible multi-skilled workforce, in which - in a manufacturing environment for example - the specialised skilled machinist operating one machine tool in one particular work station would be replaced by a generalised skilled machinist with flexible job boundaries. As regards just-in-time production, the objective here is the elimination or minimisation of waste. Inventory control is used to maintain minimum stocks, and products are made to order rather than to long-term forecasts of demand. Once again, the introduction of such a system is likely to require a re-examination of working practices.

The third element identified as part of hard QM is total quality control, which seeks to achieve quality by assigning primary responsibility for the quality of work to those at the point of production or service delivery. This means that sub-standard work can be detected and corrected at source, thus removing the need for retrospective checks. Quality is therefore “built-in” rather than inspected, the aim being to achieve what Crosby (1984) calls “zero defects” by getting things “right first time”. TQC also encompasses the use of statistical process control (SPC) to assess and measure product quality, the use of quantitative methods of data interpretation (such as pareto analysis and process flow charting), as well as a range of other production management techniques.

QM has further implications for the nature of employee discretion and autonomy in so far as it calls for greater active co-operation rather than mere compliance. In Japan, because the just-in-time production system is delicate and vulnerable to disruption it is often underpinned by a well established system of HRM and by a strong management ideology (Bratton, 1992), and it is these two aspects which here constitute “soft QM”.

As regards the first of these, although I have acknowledged that the scope of such changes is often exaggerated, nevertheless the adoption of HRM-style techniques has signalled something of a departure from a prevailing pluralist orthodoxy of joint regulation, procedures and custom and practice towards a more unitarist frame of reference which embraces flexibility, communication and involvement. In this context HRM can be seen to encompass a broad range of initiatives across a number of areas: employee selection; training and development; appraisal and reward; harmonisation and single status; job evaluation and the simplification of grading structures; open two-way communications; enterprise-style trade unionism; and various forms of employee involvement and participation, from steering committees and team briefings (largely management-led) to the more “bottom-up” quality circles.

The link between QM and HRM can be clarified by reference to Storey’s (1992) distinction between personnel management and HRM. Whilst the former encompasses the techniques of selection, appraisal, reward and development of employees, the latter is defined as the integration of these techniques with business strategy, together with an underlying logic in pursuit of employee commitment. And in the case of an organisation



with QM, this means *employee commitment to quality principles*. As Wilkinson has therefore observed,

TQM appears to be consistent with a move towards human resource management, not only in the emphasis on employee commitment rather than compliance, and in the underlying unitarist philosophy, but also in that both identify line managers as having a key responsibility for the management of people. Both TQM and HRM call for the involvement of top management, and in this sense can be seen as requiring a more strategic approach to the management of labour (1992b: 14).

As regards the role of management ideology in QM, this relates to perhaps the most fundamental aim of any QM programme, namely customer satisfaction. When discussing the concept of a “quality chain”, Oakland (1993) stresses that the chain can be broken at any point by one person or piece of equipment not meeting the requirements of the customer, whether “internal” or “external”, and that by focusing on internal customer expectations all along the supply chain to the final customer in the marketplace, an internal customer environment will be built up. The task for management is therefore to establish a culture in which employees think in terms of their own individual suppliers and customers, and in which the maxims of “customer satisfaction” and “continuous improvement” are fully integrated into all activities. Many of the HRM techniques mentioned above provide opportunities for such an ideology to be reinforced, and as such the two aspects of “soft QM” - HRM and management ideology - are interdependent. As Geary says,

the drive for continuous improvement requires management to educate and instil in their workforce a commitment to attaining high quality standards and to continually strive to meet customers’ requirements .... In particular, the ideology accompanying TQM .... speaks of teamwork and shared interests (1993: 5 and 15).

Of crucial importance in the development of the appropriate QM corporate culture is management commitment. QM proponents agree that cultural change must be seen to be

endorsed by senior management, and that senior management must be seen actively to participate and promote by example quality ideas (the production of a “mission” or “vision” statement is a common first step in this regard).

### **1.3 The Quality Management Literature**

As already noted, the bulk of the literature on QM is highly prescriptive, and tends to assume that employees will simply welcome quality improvement initiatives. This prescriptive approach is best exemplified in the work of the so-called management “gurus” (cf. Crosby, 1984; Deming, 1986; Feigenbaum, 1983; Ishikawa, 1985; Juran, 1988), and in Britain by Oakland (1993).

Although this approach to the subject may be dominant in terms of the volume of shelf space which it takes up, it is a body of literature with which the current study is not overly concerned. To begin with, the origins of much of the prescriptive literature on QM lie within the manufacturing and operations fields, and as a result

it is unlikely that the TQM gurus would have much time for the so-called “soft” definition given their emphasis on tools, measurement and bottom-line performance. Although there is a recognition of the role which needs to be played by employees in making TQM operate effectively, the principal focus of their work remains on the statistical and operational characteristics of the system (Wilkinson *et al.*, 1992: 3).

The limitations of taking such an approach are by now well established. For instance, it is common within this literature for solutions to the technical issues of designing appropriate quality procedures to be fully specified, whilst the employee co-operation that QM may require is taken for granted. There is usually very little discussion of the

problems that managers may experience in attempting to apply the techniques, and little or no information about how QM is perceived by employees. Moreover, the principles of QM are generally assumed to be universally applicable, and it is also assumed that all organisations will necessarily benefit from the introduction of QM. As Wilkinson, Allen and Snape have observed,

the whole question of the problems faced in implementing TQM is relatively neglected by the [prescriptive] literature, and there is little systematic discussion of what conditions are necessary for such an approach to be successful .... Implementation is [seen as] unproblematic for management and unitarism is an underlying theme which remains unquestioned. Implementation is seen as a matter of motivation, with the correct attitudes being instilled by simple training programmes (1991: 26).

Quite apart from these shortcomings, it is in any case unwise to assume that the textbook literature on QM has the degree of influence over actual management practice that its authors and publishers often like to claim. Although senior management may sometimes be receptive to the promise of “quick-fix” solutions, managers at the sharp end of QM implementation tend to assume a far more pragmatic position. As Hyman thus reminds us,

it is dangerous to accept the recipes and panaceas of particular management “experts” - the “active conceptive ideologists” of capitalism - as generally adopted managerial strategies .... The strategic imagination displayed by capitalism’s academic advisers may achieve little resonance within capitalist’s actual practice (1987: 32).

Although the prescriptive literature on QM may be of limited value, there has in recent years arisen a large body of more analytical work which takes a far more critical perspective on the nature and implications of quality initiatives, and it is this literature with which the current study is primarily engaged. It has developed out of the field of industrial sociology as well as more mainstream industrial relations and HRM debates,

and can be broadly categorised into four distinct approaches: (i) the optimistic model; (ii) the exploitation model; (iii) the contingency model; and (iv) the re-organisation of control model.

### 1.3.1 The Optimistic Model

This is essentially the argument that QM and other similar forms of work re-organisation entail an increase in workers' skills and result in genuine employee "empowerment". For example, some writers within the labour process tradition have argued that "hard QM" production methods do indeed reunite conceptual and manual tasks, and are therefore largely progressive in their implications for employees. This view is often predicated on the notion of a clear-cut qualitative break from a previous era of Fordist mass production and Taylorist management practices, to a new so-called "post-Fordist" era of technical innovation, re-skilling and high-trust teamworking. In this context, QM is seen as generally beneficial for employees, in so far as it allows for job enlargement, multi-skilling and enhanced responsibility for quality control at the point of production or service delivery (for the roots of this approach: cf. Abernathy *et al.*, 1983; Piore and Sabel, 1984; Tolliday and Zeitlin, 1986).

The limitations of this approach have been well rehearsed. For example, Elger (1990) has shown how buzz-words like "flexible specialisation", "functional flexibility" and "Japanisation" may serve to highlight potentially significant changes, but they still obscure the shifting and contradictory nature of the social relations involved. Much of Pollert's work has questioned the whole model of transformation through flexible

specialisation (cf. Pollert, 1991). And as we will see, there is a far larger body of work within the labour process tradition that considers the concept of “empowerment” as no more than a rhetorical sham to hide a reality of work intensification and increasing stress.

An optimistic view of the implications of QM for employees is perhaps more likely to be found within the more mainstream HRM literature. Here, for instance, Cruise O’Brien (1995) discusses the potential for QM to increase the commitment of employees to performance improvement, whilst Hill (1991 and 1991b) has concluded that QM has the potential to institutionalise employee participation on a permanent basis. As we will see, this view has also been subjected to a good deal of criticism, much of it from a “contingency” perspective.

### 1.3.2 The Exploitation Model

In marked contrast to the optimistic approach is the argument that QM necessarily results in the increasing subordination of employees in return for little or no extra reward. Rather than conceiving of a radical shift to “post-Fordism”, the majority of recent work within the labour process tradition has emphasised the essential continuity within recent changes, highlighting the continuing “degradation of work” through the de-skilling effects of new technology, and the pressures of established employment relations and occupational hierarchies which tend to reproduce established patterns of work organisation. In this context, QM is seen as simply the latest in a long line of work intensification techniques, albeit a more sophisticated one than traditional Taylorism (for the roots of this approach:

cf. Braverman, 1974; Sayer, 1986; Tomaney, 1990. For a critical appraisal of QM: cf. Delbridge, Turnbull and B. Wilkinson, 1992).

A typical example of this approach is that of Delbridge and Turnbull (1992). They describe task-based teamworking as a form of “management through compliance”, whereby organising workers into teams and making these teams accountable for their own performance allows firms operating a JIT production system to impose a “customer ethos” on the workforce, and harness the peer pressure of fellow team members to ensure compliance to company objectives. TQC is similarly characterised as “management through blame”, with the use of quality charts and SPC tending to structure experimentation and therefore in fact *reduce* workers’ freedom to make process changes, whilst at the same time acting as a system of surveillance and monitoring to ensure compliance. And JIT is defined as “management by stress”, since it is underwritten by the notion of “continuous improvement”, whereby all elements of waste are systematically and progressively eliminated, thus implying a continual intensification of the work routine.

Similarly, in a study of a Japanese-owned electronics plant, Sewell and B. Wilkinson use Foucault’s (1977) concept of the “panopticon” to describe the surveillance and control capacities of the quality monitoring system. This includes the use of “traffic lights” above each worker, which act as a constant reminder of individual performance whilst also relaying this information to the wider audience of the team. The system allows management to solve the “quality-quantity dilemma” by establishing a dynamic balance between production volume and production quality, whereby

the extent of the amber zone (one to four errors) has been set .... to represent a level of performance where the number of errors are acceptable but which also creates a climate where all members are constantly made aware of the need to make improvements (1992: 108).

There does appear to be a growing number of critical case studies that suggest a clear contrast between what Sewell and B. Wilkinson call the

rhetoric of empowerment, trust and mutual dependency .... [and] the shop-floor reality of pervasive regimes of constant electronic and peer group scrutiny (1992: 98) (see also: McArdle *et al.*, 1995; Parker and Slaughter, 1993; Sewell and B. Wilkinson, 1991; Tuckman, 1995).

However, just as the “optimistic/empowerment” perspective tends to underestimate the complexities of contemporary work restructuring, so this “exploitation/intensification” argument similarly fails to adequately address the complexities of QM, or to recognise its essentially indeterminate nature in terms of its effects on employee autonomy and involvement. Take, for example, the case study by McArdle *et al.* of “PCB Electronics”. They clearly document employees in the company as perceiving the move to QM as leading to a better way of working and higher job satisfaction, and yet conclude quite categorically that

although employees at the plant *appear* to gain more satisfaction from the job enlargement process .... TQM has introduced management by stress .... into the plant and forced workers to indulge in their own work intensification (1995: 170) [my emphasis].

This thesis also presents a good deal of evidence which shows a generally favourable attitude to QM on the part of employees. However, this evidence is not dismissed as “false consciousness”, but is considered to be as valid as other evidence showing the negative implications for employees which QM can have. The literature on QM implying work intensification must not be neglected, and studies such as those quoted above have

usefully criticised the more optimistic accounts. But many such analyses tend to take an equally one-sided view:

If most orthodox literature on business strategy ignores or marginalises the conflict between capital and labour, most Marxist literature perceives nothing else (Hyman, 1987: 34).

As Storey and Sisson have observed of the labour process tradition in particular,

empirical underpinning is too often unsatisfactory, and even when data is presented it seems to be in the form of using examples to illustrate theory rather than to test it .... There is [thus] a need for theories of the “middle range” (1989: 176 and 177).

### 1.3.3 The Contingency Model

One approach which appears to provide exactly this is exemplified in the work of Adrian Wilkinson (cf. Wilkinson, Godfrey and Marchington, 1996; Wilkinson and Witcher, 1991). The essential argument is that QM could in principle bring significant benefits to both management and employees, but that when introduced it invariably fails to live up to the initial promise. In practice many companies pay only lip service to the idea of quality, there is often resistance from middle managers, and short-term demands often interfere with longer-term goals.

Other writers have also highlighted the contingent aspects of QM, such as the problematic nature of attempting to foster commitment to quality principles through the use of HRM techniques. Take, for example, the use of quality circles, which hold out the promise of improving communications and winning the active commitment of employees to quality



improvements. Research has shown that quality circles are often established as a parallel or dualistic structure which co-exists outside of the existing organisational hierarchy, and as such are doomed to fail in the face of middle management recalcitrance and inadequate reward systems (cf. Hill, 1991b; Schuler and Harris, 1992; Wilkinson, 1994).

More problematical still for management may be attempts to generate employee commitment to QM through the use of HRM-style appraisal and payment strategies. There is an implicit contradiction between collectivism and individualism in attempts to develop a collective identity around teamwork at the same time as discriminating between individual employees contributions through performance-related pay (cf. Legge, 1989), and employees themselves will recognise a payment strategy that pulls in different directions. Even where performance-related pay is not used, performance appraisals may be perceived as arbitrary and subjective. As for the use of job evaluation as a basis for a more simplified grading structure, this too can lead to a great deal of disquiet over the manner in which jobs are measured and evaluated. So, in this particular area

the HRM dimension to management's compensation strategies - appraisal, performance-related pay and job evaluation - [may itself be] .... the locus for much of employees' dissatisfaction and not the level of compensation *per se* (Geary, 1992: 50).

Attempts to foster commitment to QM through the use of HRM techniques are clearly far from straightforward, and as such it may be necessary for employers adopting quality principles to pay careful attention to the other component of "soft QM", namely management ideology. Here too, however, the problems are well documented. It is now widely accepted that in many organisations QM programmes are initially received with some enthusiasm by employees, but that this soon wanes and disillusionment quickly

follows. Seddon (1989) has claimed that this is due to management's preoccupation with hard QM considerations such as costs and production performance, and their relative neglect of soft QM aspects such as employee commitment and customer perceptions.

Wilkinson makes a similar point when he argues that

there may well be tensions between the production-oriented "hard" aspects of TQM which tend to emphasise working within prescribed procedures and the "soft" aspects which emphasise employee involvement and commitment. Management [often] give insufficient attention to examining the underlying values and resulting behaviour of employees, with the result that there is a failure to achieve the "cultural change" necessary if TQM is to be successfully implemented (1992: 326).

Oliver and B. Wilkinson (1992) have similarly noted that many British employers do not fully appreciate the high dependency relationships implicit in the use of hard QM, and generally have failed to synchronise their personnel and labour relations carefully to manufacturing strategy.

Wilkins (1984) has argued that successful QM companies are able to develop a management ideology and an organisational culture in such a way that employees simply adopt the new philosophy as if it were communicated directly by the senior managers who originally articulated it. Others are far less optimistic. Ogbonna (1992), for instance, has questioned the extent to which the ideology of QM is capable of penetrating deep-seated attitudes. More to the point, he questions the extent to which QM organisations are really concerned about genuine cultural change; put simply, it may not matter to management whether or not employee behaviour is based on internalised values, as long as it is the right behaviour (see also: Sturdy, 1994).

In contrast to extreme applications of the optimistic and exploitation models, research adopting a contingency perspective highlights the need to resist the easy conclusion that the implications of QM for employees are necessarily either all good or all bad. Rather, the reality is often a mixture of extended employee involvement together with tighter management control. As Wilkinson, Allen and Snape conclude from their own case study research,

TQM might be seen as an attempt by management to control employees through internal discipline and self-control. However [in both case studies] the workforce appeared to be reasonably enthusiastic about the TQM programme .... As a form of involvement, TQM may appear to offer immediate, tangible benefits to employees in a way that traditional forms of participation perhaps do not (1991: 30).

#### 1.3.4 The Re-organisation of Control Model

Finally, a fourth distinct analytical perspective on QM can be identified. It has something in common with the labour process tradition, in that the nature of production and the organisation of work tasks are considered to be crucial factors in determining the boundaries of employee autonomy and discretion. However, it stops short of concluding that the implications of QM for employees tend invariably to be negative. Rather, QM is here seen as

one among a series of changes, which also embrace new technology and new payment systems, which re-organise the shop-floor so that in some respects commitment is enhanced while in others control is also tightened (Collinson, Rees and Edwards, 1996: 7-8).

This position also shares much common ground with the contingency model, stressing as it does that many of the practices associated with QM have had ambiguous effects so far

as employees are concerned. There is already a range of case study based literature which addresses the “optimistic/empowerment” and the “exploitation/intensification” theses and concludes that neither of these contradictory interpretations is wholly accurate. Rather, QM tends to give greater autonomy to those at the lower end of the organisational hierarchy *at the same time as* providing for tighter management control (cf. Bratton, 1991; Davies and Fitzgerald-Moore, 1996; Dawson and Webb, 1989; Geary, 1993 and 1994; Rees, 1996, 1996b and 1996c; Webb, 1993). Perhaps the clearest exposition of this view is to be found in the work of John Geary. Discussing the nature of direct task participation, he concludes that

although management may grant employees considerable freedom to be self-managing, it is a practice which has not diluted managerial control over the labour process: it has rather been redefined and exercised in a different form. It would seem that management has at once become both enabling and restraining (1994, 650).

In essence, this thesis seeks to describe and explain findings which show the various ways in which these twin dimensions of QM are reflected in the views of employees in four different organisations.

#### **1.4 The Theoretical Position of the Study**

It will be apparent that there are many overlapping themes across the analytical perspectives outlined above. Likewise, the same authors may appear under more than one heading. The four-fold categorisation is not meant to represent rigid divisions, but merely to highlight differing emphases within the literature.

The approach adopted here is one of scanning across the four analytical approaches, with evidence presented which supports both the “optimistic” model (especially in Chapters Five and Six) as well as the “exploitation” model (Chapters Seven and Eight). Ultimately, however, the theoretical position of the study centres on a combination of the “re-organisation of control” and “contingency” models. The argument is advanced that in each of the four case study organisations QM has led to a re-organisation of control, and the contingency model is utilised in order to highlight some of the specific determinants of different organisational outcomes.

In this respect, the thesis follows Storey and Sisson (1989) in arguing for a conception of QM which is theoretically in the “middle range”; QM is seen as essentially a form of management control, whilst at the same time recognition is given to the real benefits which it can provide for some employees. In arguing that control under QM is consolidated through a complex mixture of compliance and consent, the study also borrows to some extent from the set of theoretical tools developed by Edwards (1986).<sup>(1)</sup> These include the idea of a “frontier of control”, and the distinction between “general control” and “detailed control”:

The frontier will indicate where control of a particular aspect of the production process lies .... The frontier .... indicates .... [how] a particular issue such as the movement of workers between jobs is decided .... The idea of a frontier of control .... points to an important distinction between what may be called detailed control and general control. The former refers to who controls all the decisions about how immediate work tasks are to be carried out, and is conveniently analysed using the metaphor of a frontier. The latter covers the broader issue of securing workers’ commitment to the aims of the enterprise (Edwards, 1986: 78-79).

It is argued throughout this study that “empowerment” is one of the major defining features of any QM strategy, but that although this is based upon increasing autonomy

and discretion for employees over immediate work tasks - i.e. increasing “detailed” control - QM invariably entails a simultaneous increase in more “general” managerial control. In Edwards’ terms,

maximising detailed control is not necessarily the employer’s aim; general control, however, remains important .... Underlying .... the many schemes that have been introduced to increase workers’ participation in the enterprise .... is the wish to persuade workers to use their creativity to overcome problems in the production process .... *The aim is to improve general control while reducing the employer’s detailed control* .... Improving general control does not solve the problem of gaining compliance but *shifts the terrain on which the problem is managed*, with accompanying changes in the balance of interests (1986: 79 and 80) [my emphasis].

This study attempts to show how this describes precisely the nature and operation of QM within four case study organisations. Quality management strategies allow for genuine empowerment and greater detailed control for employees at the point of production or service delivery, *at the same time as* providing management with increasing general control. QM thus shifts the “terrain of control” within organisations, without posing any threat to the fundamental “structured antagonism” inherent in capitalist employment relations.

Underlying the study is the theoretical position that capitalism is exploitative in that surplus value is generated under the constraints of the accumulation process. However, the analysis is a materialist one rather than a Marxist one.<sup>(2)</sup> What essentially stops the analysis from being Marxist is the proposition that

this exploitation establishes only the broad nature of the relationship between the abstractions of capital and labour. It does not follow that workers will have an interest in overcoming exploitation since *the fact of being exploited cannot be separated from other aspects of the mode of production* (Edwards, 1986: 321-22) [my emphasis].

And in an organisation with QM, these “other aspects” may be numerous and include: a high rate of pay; improved working conditions; autonomy and discretion over problem-solving; and increased job satisfaction through teamworking and specialist training. I have already criticised some of the research based on the “exploitation model of QM” for failing to take adequate account of these factors, especially when they are emphasised strongly by employees themselves. If one rejects the notion of employees having objective “interests” then explication in terms of “false consciousness” becomes meaningless. Moreover, there is in fact no reason to assume that an identifiable increase in exploitation under QM is necessarily even a “bad thing” for employees. As Edwards again points out,

to say that a mode of production is exploitative is not to condemn it .... The question of whether one form of exploitation is better than another has to be settled *by individuals making their own judgements and not by analytical deduction* .... When exploitation is seen in the purely technical sense of the extraction of surplus from direct producers, a high rate of exploitation may be “better” than a low rate; for example, capitalists practising direct control may create small amounts of surplus using autocratic and coercive methods while *those using more participative forms of management .... may produce a higher rate of exploitation with less obvious suffering on the part of their workers* (1986: 90) [my emphasis].

Broadly speaking, this describes the situation in the four case studies reported here. Employees were allowed to make “their own judgements”, and reported increasing work pressure and stress together with increasing job satisfaction.<sup>(3)</sup>

What Edwards refers to as a “structured antagonism” could equally be considered as a “contradiction” at the heart of capitalist work relations, and the notion of contradiction is also crucial in understanding the re-organisation in the terrain of control which QM implies:

Quality management is represented by its advocates as a means of delivering universally beneficial gains in productivity. Little or no consideration is given to the possibility that the failings of existing systems are, at least in part, symptomatic of more fundamental divisions and contradictions in the organisation of work within capitalist economies (Wilkinson and Willmott, 1995: 12-13).

Indeed, the analysis here documents the scope for strategic choice which managers have in relation to QM, whilst also arguing that this scope is necessarily limited. Contradictions within the capitalist enterprise create openings for strategic choice whilst at the same time entailing that no strategy will prove successful.<sup>(4)</sup> As a result, QM is ultimately no more or no less successful than any previous management strategy in overcoming these contradictions:

The literature on corporate management has no lack of recipes for structural re-organisation to enhance control and information systems and hence facilitate strategic direction .... [However, although] “organisational failure” may indeed be compounded by avoidable deficiencies .... [it] is at root attributable to the contradictory purposes inherent in the capitalist enterprise itself. For the same reason, no amalgam of market and organisational processes can offer the means to harmonisation (Hyman, 1987: 32).

Despite this gloomy prognosis, the conclusions drawn in this thesis are not pessimistic in tone. QM may not rid the modern workplace of the contradictory logics of capitalism, but by any standards this would be a lot to ask. Seen in more pragmatic and realistic terms - and seen through the eyes of the managers and employees in the four organisations described here - it can, in the right circumstances, lead to less grandiose but nevertheless still significant benefits.



## Notes

1. Edwards' overall aim is to 'understand the basis of conflict in work relations, how conflict and co-operation are intertwined, and the ways in which the expression of conflict can vary' (1986: 14). The "materialist theory of workplace relations" which he advances is based on 'an analysis of exploitation and the identification of a "structured antagonism" between dominant and subordinate groups within any exploitive mode of production' (1986: 58). Edwards applies the theory most specifically to the capitalist mode of production, and examines conflict at three different levels. These are '(i) the mode of production in general, (ii) the broad principles of the organisation of the labour process, and (iii) the concrete operation of the labour process in the real world' (1986: 60). It is the third of these levels of analysis which represents the primary focus of this study. That is, it is concerned with examining how the concrete organisation of work under QM reflects the "structured antagonism" which exists between capital and labour, and leads to a particular balance between compliance and consent within the workplace.
2. Although much of the approach outlined here can be said to be broadly Marxist in nature - e.g. the stress on exploitation within the labour process and the willingness to analyse the capitalist mode of production in terms of abstractions such as "capital" and "labour" - there remain crucial points of difference between this view and the "exploitation model of QM". As Edwards says, 'Marxists must be materialists, but not all materialists need be Marxists .... Marxism must propose some logic of social development such that exploitation will be transcended, whereas materialism makes no such claim' (1986: 86 and 88-89). And it is this which makes this study materialist but not Marxist. In other words, there is no assumption behind the research that managers and employees have any particularly strongly held interests, still less class interests, that they bring to the employment relationship. In fact, 'the need is not to presume that there are certain basic real interests but to consider how the location of people in objective conditions encourages the growth of some preferences and not others' (Edwards, 1986: 28).
3. In terms of the materialist theory of workplace relations, this general finding should come as no surprise, since it reflects perhaps the most fundamental principle of the theory, namely that 'work relations .... involve co-operation, adaptation, and accommodation as well as conflict. And these things are not separate but are produced together .... The production process .... [is] a social relationship in which co-operation and conflict are jointly created' (Edwards, 1986: 5 and 54).
4. Hyman has described the different levels at which these contradictions operate in some depth. For instance, in terms of the role of managers: 'The contradictory role of management as both co-ordinator of a complex and often baffling productive operation, and simultaneously a vehicle of discipline and disruption, is almost inevitably reflected in consequential contradictions both *between* and *within* the various managerial specialisms' (1987: 35). And in terms of technology he states that: 'Three general propositions emerge. The first is that there is no "one best technology" for capitalist success. Concerns with product design, quality and price may have incompatible implications for production technologies, and may in turn conflict with any imperative for labour control. The choice of technology, accordingly, is a social and political and not merely a technical question. Secondly, and in consequence, "organisational failures" in technological choice may reflect deeper functional contradictions within management. And thirdly, the technical organisation of production cannot be divorced from its social organisation; and their interrelationship both conditions, and is conditioned by, the balance of power relations between management and workers' (1987: 37). At all levels, then, the concern is to stress that the effects of these contradictions are dynamic and shifting. QM reflects as much as any other management control strategy the contradiction between compliance and consent, and the precise form that any particular QM strategy takes in practice will consequently be a product of on-going negotiation and adaptation. To quote Hyman again: 'Underlying both the potential lack of integration between levels of intervention and the impact of internal management division is the underlying contradiction involved in capitalist control over labour; and it is this, in turn, which creates a potential for *worker* initiative in ways which further adapt and qualify the strategies of management' (1987: 49).

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Having outlined the theoretical position of the study in the previous chapter, this chapter expands upon the methodology which was employed in order to examine the nature of employee involvement in QM in each of the four organisations. The case study approach is discussed, and a description is given of the key variables as between the four case study companies, together with other factual information concerning research sites and the process of gathering the case study material. Finally, the main focus of the study on employee perceptions is briefly reiterated.

#### **2.1 The Case Study Method**

This study is concerned with the reality of the operation of quality management strategies. It attempts to illuminate the balance between control and commitment within four different kinds of workplace setting, and to assess management and employee attitudes towards the philosophy and the practice of QM. In light of these aims, a qualitative case study approach is essential. The re-organisation of control which QM implies is not easily observed and quantified, and as a result the full implications of QM for employee involvement can only be adequately addressed through detailed case study research. Moreover, whilst the previous chapter outlined the theoretical basis of the study within the re-organisation of control perspective, it also stressed the utility of the contingency perspective as a means of explaining differences between the four cases. As

an example, the propensity that the direct forms of employee involvement characteristic of QM may have to undermine more collective means of representation through trade unions is heavily contingent upon the specific context in which they are utilised. And if this context is to be fully appreciated then analysis needs to go beyond the surface appearance of management policy.

This study is based on case studies of four organisations. Two of these are in the manufacturing sector (“Auto Components” and “Office Tech”) and two are in the private services sector (“New Bank” and “Hotel Co”). Two main approaches have been used in order to probe the nature of each QM strategy and its implications for employees. Firstly, in each case a series of lengthy semi-structured interviews have been conducted with members of management at all levels. It is important not to restrict attention to those directly involved with the QM programme, and so the views of a wide range of managers on the relevance of QM and its place within business policy more generally have been sought. Secondly, as well as numerous informal conversations with lower-grade employees, as far as the assessment of employee reactions is concerned it is essential to complement this qualitative approach with quantitative data which is more broadly representative of employee attitudes. Consequently, the study has also involved the administering of detailed structured questionnaires to a representative sample of employees within each of the four case study organisations.

The rationale behind this two-pronged approach is that it allows the study to go beyond the broad policy statements of senior management to consider the impact of QM on employees. Its strength lies in the detailed description which it provides of complex

processes, providing a first-hand account of the implementation and perception of strategic change. Indeed, it will become evident in subsequent chapters that the respondents from each organisation have been allowed as far as possible to speak for themselves, thus providing for a genuine account of the actual practice of QM, as described by those charged with its implementation and subject to its effects. The research process garnered a rich body of qualitative data, and the study has been written up in such a way as to reflect this as far as possible, whilst at the same time not allowing the data to smother, or detract from, the central arguments.

The main charge commonly levelled against the case study approach is that it does not allow for adequate generalisations to be made. This study may involve a number of detailed case studies, but they remain four distinct instances of QM, and generalisation of findings is therefore problematic. Although in one sense this may indeed be a valid criticism, to a large extent it misses the point. The argument here is not that the findings in one particular case study organisation are likely to be replicated exactly in others. Rather, the intention is to demonstrate that the approach used in order to understand the nature of employee involvement in QM in the four cases is an approach which may be fruitfully applied to any other instance of QM. In other words, what such case studies allow for is *theoretical* generalisation (Yin, 1984). As Ferner has pointed out,

case studies are not like survey samples. They are generalisable not to populations or universes, but to theoretical ideas (1989: 7).

The theoretical ideas alluded to here centre on the notion of “re-organisation of control” and on the contradictory bases of QM strategy. As such, to criticise this research because it is based on only four case studies is unreasonable. Given the arguments that the thesis

is making, simply increasing the sample size is not the appropriate way to improve upon their generalisability. Rather than increasing sample size, with this kind of research

generalisations have to stand or fall by virtue of the soundness of the theoretical reasoning, and the quality of the empirical data collected (Ferner, 1989: 7).

To argue otherwise implies a failure to appreciate one of the key strengths of the in-depth case study, namely its ability to examine underlying processes and thus to allow for connections to be made between cause and effect. As Watson says,

detailed ethnographic or case study research .... is a means of generalising about processes managers get involved in and about basic organisational activities, rather than about “all managers” or “all organisations” as such (1994: 7).

Those who reject the case study approach on the grounds that it is believed to allow insufficient generalisability are likely to consider the large-scale survey to be a more stringent methodological tool. The most widely used recent example of this in the field is the Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (WIRS) series (Daniel and Millward, 1983; Millward and Stevens, 1986; Millward *et al.*, 1992). The three WIRS surveys have concentrated on collecting data on industrial relations structures, processes and outcomes. In so doing, the people considered best placed to provide information were a senior manager - usually from a personnel department - and a union representative:

There was little if any attempt to gather information on respondents' opinions or perceptions, still less to seek employees perceptions. This approach is .... at one end of the research methodology spectrum, with case studies at the other end placing context centre-stage and exploring issues in a far more detailed and interrogative way than can be pursued through survey research (Geary, 1996: 3).

Taking the first point which Geary raises here, the benefits of exploring managerial respondents' opinions more deeply are well illustrated by Wright's recent work on the closed shop, or “compulsory unionism” as he terms it. The orthodox view is that during

the last decade the closed shop has largely collapsed, and taken together the three WIRS surveys do indeed show a progressive decline. However, the WIRS surveys tended to simply ask respondents whether or not such institutions existed. By probing respondents' views in more detail, Wright is able to demonstrate that compulsory unionism survives informally. He found evidence of

fewer written union membership agreements .... [but] more unwritten verbal agreements and unofficial understandings (1996: 2).

As a result, he concluded that

WIRS may have recorded “official” policy, compared to “unofficial” practice in the present study .... Some form of mandatory unionism may have been maintained without overt senior management approval, either with supervisory management complicity, and/or by unilateral work group regulation .... WIRS may have under-reported the extent of the closed shop (1996: 21 and 22).

It is pertinent to cite Wright's work in this context, since one of the four case study organisations here (Auto Components) effectively operates with an “unofficial closed shop”, and - as we will see in Chapter Eight - the dynamics of its operation are illuminated only as a result of interview respondents having been given the space to expand upon initial questions.

Aside from the tendency not to explore managerial views in sufficient detail, the other weakness in large-scale survey work that Geary refers to is the failure to seek out employee perceptions. The WIRS surveys are based on the assumption that in obtaining information from a “representative” one is somehow obtaining an employee perspective. However, this is a highly misleading assumption to make. In another example which

finds resonance within the current study, Geary highlights the dangers of relying on simple “yes/no” questions about the existence or otherwise of teamworking:

The presence of teamworking as reported by management tells us little of how work organisation may have or may not have changed. There may have been considerable informal teamworking in place and its formal introduction by management may have had a negligible effect. Alternatively, while management may have moved to introduce teamworking, this may not have been accompanied by an increase in employees’ discretion or autonomy. Thus the employee survey will provide us with vital information in our attempts to assess the significance of change as it affects life on the shop-floor or in the office (1996: 7-8).

This argument is borne out very clearly in Chapter Five, where evidence is presented of employees displaying a well developed sense of “team spirit” in spite of - or in some cases even *because* of - the absence of formal or “official” teamworking. Once again, this situation would not have been exposed if the opinions of employees themselves had not been widely canvassed.

Although this study is case study based, it is not entirely qualitative, since it includes the use of a survey. However, this is a survey of *employees*. Surveying employees opinions is necessary if the complexity of the operation of issues such as teamworking is to be appreciated. Moreover, employee surveys can then have the knock-on effect of informing larger-scale surveys which may have only one managerial respondent to ask better questions. In this sense,

while each methodological approach has its respective strengths and weaknesses .... a survey of employees could provide something of a new methodological and analytical bridge between survey research data .... and case study research (Geary, 1996: 3-4).

It is in this spirit that the current study has been undertaken. Too often there is a failure to acknowledge that case studies and surveys have the potential to be used in a complementary rather than contradictory fashion. In seeking to do just this, the current study has consequently yielded a much fuller picture of the operation and implications of QM. As Bryman has observed,

the tendency to talk about quantitative and qualitative research as though they are separate paradigms has produced ideal-type descriptions of each tradition with strong programmatic overtones, and consequently has obscured the areas of overlap, both actual and potential, between them .... Rather than the somewhat doctrinaire posturing of a great deal of the literature dealing with the epistemological leanings of quantitative and qualitative research, there should be a greater recognition in discussions of the general aspects of social research of the need to generate good research (1988: 172-73).

## **2.2 The Process of Data Collection**

The research project began in October 1992. Initially a large number of companies were contacted who professed to be operating some form of QM programme. Exploratory meetings were held at a number of these companies during the first six months of 1993. As the focus of the study became clearer, a smaller panel of companies were selected for follow-up interviews during the latter part of 1993. At this stage, the final four companies on which the project is based all appeared likely to be willing to allow wider access for case study purposes, and this access was granted during subsequent meetings with the following personnel: the Personnel and Quality Director at Auto Components; the Personnel Director at Office Tech; the Quality Service Co-ordinator at a regional office of New Bank; and the Quality Support Manager at the executive offices of Hotel Co. A series of lengthy interviews were then conducted with a range of managerial staff at each



of the four companies over a period of some twelve months until the end of 1994. The job titles of these interviewees are recorded in Appendix One.

At the same time as this programme of interviews was being conducted, an employee questionnaire was developed (see Appendix Two). Senior managers at each of the four companies were given a first draft of the questionnaire, and had the opportunity to point out any questions which they did not want employees to be asked, as well as to add questions on any issues which they particularly did want to be covered. In the event, the questionnaire remained unaltered in respect of employees at Auto Components and Office Tech. However, changes were made in respect of the other two companies. A senior manager at New Bank was very keen to know more about the perceptions branch staff have of their own competencies, and as a result six extra questions were added to the section on training in the New Bank questionnaire. And senior management at Hotel Co were adamant that they did not want employees to be asked about the merits or otherwise of trade union membership. It became effectively a condition of access that questions about trade unions were not included, and so these were dropped from the final version of the Hotel Co questionnaire.

Once it had been finalised, the questionnaire was administered to a representative sample of employees at each company. It was intended that this sample be 50 in each case, and that as many questionnaires as possible be administered on a face-to-face basis by the author. However, in the event there was some variation between the four companies. At Auto Components 50 questionnaires were administered on a face-to-face basis without any problems arising. An additional interesting comparative factor was made available by

giving 25 of the questionnaires to employees in the “new shop” (where the greatest investment in new machinery and work practices has occurred), and 25 to those in the “old shop” (where rather more traditional methods still prevail). The other cases were less straightforward. At both New Bank and Hotel Co it proved impossible to administer any more than a small number face-to-face, due to managers not feeling able to spare employees’ time. As a result, most questionnaires were returned by post by the employees themselves, and the final numbers fell just short of the target of 50 (48 from New Bank and 49 from Hotel Co). Senior management at Office Tech had originally agreed in principle to allowing the author to talk to a small number of production workers face-to-face, but when it came to administering the questionnaire this permission was withdrawn. The Personnel Manager distributed over 100 questionnaires to a random sample of employees, and although over 50 were returned a number had been completed by employees in staff grades rather than production workers. These were discarded, and a sample of 40 remained.

One note of caution needs to be made concerning the representativeness of these samples. In the case of Auto Components, Office Tech and Hotel Co the companies are small enough for a sample size of 50 to be unproblematic. New Bank, on the other hand, is a very large organisation, encompassing a multitude of different functions and job descriptions. To this extent, the sample of New Bank employees is evidently not as representative of the population from which it is drawn as are the other three samples.

Having acknowledged this problem, it is partly off-set by the fact that the sample of New Bank employees covers a considerable range of functions at both branch and business

centre levels (as indicated in Appendix One). Moreover, the views expressed through the questionnaires by employees at all four organisations are frequently reflected in the more qualitative data, and this is particularly the case at New Bank. The sample of employees at New Bank consistently advance near unanimous views on key issues, and it is thus unlikely that their opinions would not have been clearly reflected in any larger sample which may have been drawn.

The process of designing and administering the questionnaire took roughly twelve months, with the final returns received in February 1995, after which began the lengthy process of data entry and data analysis. As mentioned above, the questionnaire was specifically aimed at lower-grade employees; at the two manufacturing companies this meant shop-floor production workers and operatives, at New Bank clerical grades, and at Hotel Co those below Assistant Manager level. The exact job titles of each respondent, as recorded themselves on their questionnaires, are shown in Appendix One.

### **2.3 The Selection of Case Study Companies**

Having described and justified the methodological approach of the research, this section provides more detail on the four case study organisations, and discusses the particular reasons why these companies were selected for the study. Some of the key variables as between the four organisations can be summarised as follows:

### Auto Components

Manufacturing sector  
(automotive components)  
British-owned  
Brownfield site  
Union recognition

### Office Tech

Manufacturing sector  
(office automation equipment)  
Japanese-owned  
Greenfield site  
Non-union

### New Bank

Service sector  
(financial services)  
Union recognition

### Hotel Co

Service sector  
(hotel and catering)  
Non-union

How, then, do these different variables tie in with the previous analysis of QM? It was stated in Chapter One that the conceptualisation of QM as consisting of hard and soft elements does not represent a unified paradigm, and the quality improvement initiatives of different organisations will have distinctly different emphases. Some organisations will base their quality improvement initiatives primarily on soft QM techniques with only limited use of more quantitative methods. For others, quality assurance and production standards will be of greater importance than achieving any kind of cultural change. As Webb therefore suggests,

TQM can be compared to a code of conduct, with different uses dependent on the purposes of its proponents .... TQM has different manifestations (1993: 17).

A key variable here is sector. The origins of QM lie within the production and operations field, and manufacturing firms will tend to place an emphasis upon the hard and quantifiable production aspects. In contrast, organisations in the service sector - who by definition have a greater degree of staff/customer interaction - will tend to concentrate on the more qualitative and “softer” aspects of customer care and cultural change. The key

point is that, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, these differing emphases will in turn have different implications for the nature and extent of employee involvement.

As regards the major differences between the four case study organisations, the first contrast to highlight is therefore that between the manufacturing and the service sectors. Most research on QM so far has been in the former, and yet a whole series of developments make the quality of service a major and growing issue in the private services sector. Moreover, the meaning of “quality” and the mechanisms for ensuring it are likely to differ between the two sectors.

Since one of the major concerns of the study is the implications of QM for the nature of employee representation and involvement, then a second key variable to highlight is union recognition. As Sisson points out,

whether or not a trade union is recognised for the purposes of collective bargaining .... raises fundamental questions about the emphasis managements place, consciously or not, on individualism and collectivism in their approach (1989: 9).

This is as true for the operation of QM as for any other management strategy. Hence the decision to study two organisations which recognise trade unions and two which do not. In Chapter Eight an assessment is made of the influence of the trade unions on QM in the two case study organisations where they are recognised for collective bargaining purposes, and the attitudes of employees to the role of the unions are reported in some detail.

A further notable distinction between the two manufacturing organisations is that the non-union firm is a Japanese-owned firm on a greenfield site, whilst the firm with union recognition is British and located on a brownfield site. It is often assumed that there are clear advantages for management in operating on a greenfield site, in terms of the freedom this provides to introduce pro-active HRM policies. In contrast, at a brownfield site firm with strong trade union organisation and relatively rigid demarcations, it is tempting to assume that management will find it that much more difficult to introduce initiatives based upon the maxims of flexibility and teamworking. As such, the two manufacturing sector case studies allow comparisons to be made between a context in which it is popularly considered that QM can relatively easily flourish and one that is considered to provide a far sterner test for new-style management practices. It should be noted, however, that this argument is indeed only the “popularly accepted” view, and there is now a significant amount of case study research - including the current study (see Chapter Four) - which exposes the dangers of such assumptions (cf. Clark, 1993; Newell, 1991).

As for the two service sector organisations chosen for case study purposes, one operates in the financial services industry and the other in hotel and catering. Many financial services organisations have been through extensive re-structuring over the last decade (cf. Cressey and Scott, 1992), and are increasingly turning to QM methods as a means of enhancing their market profile and improving competitive performance. Kerfoot and Knights suggest that

the pursuit of quality in financial services companies in recent years could be seen essentially as a search for competitive advantage through differentiation strategies ... largely as a result of concern among companies to differentiate themselves

from competitors in terms of service, within an industry widely acknowledged to hold minimal differences between products across competitors (1993: 7).

The same kind of pressures are also operating within the hotel and catering industry, where employee/customer interaction is similarly regarded as an increasingly important source of profitability, and where there is thus also developing a greater dependence on staff to provide what Fuller and Smith (1991) term “quality service work”.

## **2.4 The Key Focus of the Research**

As stated in Chapter One, this research is concerned with the twin themes of management strategy and employee perceptions. Existing research indicates substantial and unresolved issues around the implementation of QM, as well as the linkages between specific initiatives and measurable efficiency outcomes. The study is able to shed some light on the extent to which managers who are responsible for implementing QM are aware of these issues, and what they do to monitor difficulties.

It is, however, the detailed reporting and analysis of employee attitudes and perceptions that represents perhaps the most original and important contribution of the study. Subsequent chapters present evidence on a wide range of substantive issues, and in each case employee perceptions figure prominently. I have already argued that there is still insufficient data available regarding the operation of QM in practice and the ways in which such strategies are perceived by employees. Moreover, I have argued that where employees’ own views are sought, there is a tendency within some of the more “critical” literature to downplay the significance of expressed views. This study adopts a critical

perspective on QM, based on the notion of an inherent “structured antagonism” within capitalist work relations, and on a conception of QM as essentially a form of management control. In adopting such a perspective, however, and in seeking to illuminate the balance between compliance and consent within different forms of work organisation, there is all the more need to pay close attention to employees’ real experiences of work.

In so doing, this study makes a clear advance upon much of the existing body of knowledge in the area. To date, most serious research on QM has tended to be based on one single case study, often drawn from the manufacturing sector, and to rely primarily upon qualitative methods. The present study benefits significantly from the range of cases examined; namely, four distinct organisational settings in two different sectors. Moreover, it also has at its heart a systematic and thorough employee survey. Clearly some of the richness of a purely qualitative approach is lost as a result, and the research in this sense is not ethnographic. However, where the approach gains is in the detail and representativeness of the employee data. In particular, this allows for a far more accurate and measured assessment of the more positive implications of QM than do many of the previous critical analyses.



## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **QUALITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AT FOUR ORGANISATIONS**

Having provided a brief outline of each case study company in the previous chapter, this chapter goes into greater detail to examine the rationale and logic behind the introduction of QM in each of the four organisations. It describes what the companies have been doing in terms of quality management, and analyses the reasons why they have been doing it. The strategy of each company is conceptualised in terms of the “hard” and “soft” dimensions outlined in Chapter One, and the interdependencies between these different elements are highlighted.

#### **3.1 Auto Components**

Auto Components is a subsidiary of an American-owned group of companies, and operates on a brownfield site in the East Midlands. It manufactures a range of specialist parts for motor car engines, concentrating in particular on valve seat inserts. The quality strategy at Auto Components began with a heavy emphasis on the quality of the product and on the hard aspects of QM. It can be traced to the introduction of statistical process control in the mid-1980s. The Sales Manager joined the firm in 1986, and recalls:

When I came to the company, what really impressed me at that time was the use of SPC for controlling all of the machining processes .... Statistical process control gave us at the end of the product good supplies out to the customer, so that at least dimensionally he was getting good product .... At [Auto Components] it started off with SPC and has really mushroomed from that .... In controlling the process right from the powder coming in, that's given us a good quality product all the way through.

After the initial impetus of SPC the company decided to move progressively towards the use of modern manufacturing methods, and made a heavy capital investment (of around £2.5m) in new plant, which was located in a new factory on the site. New manufacturing systems were introduced in this factory, and a section of the workforce has been trained in quality control techniques and now operates in cells with full flexibility between tasks. Managers see the technology that has been introduced as lending itself to a particular organisation of production, namely cellular manufacturing, and as providing benefits in terms of greater efficiency of work. As the Training and Safety Officer explained:

We've still got .... a number of designated manufacturing areas - the blank shop, the grinding sections, the furnace area, the inspection section, the packing section - all specialised functions with a specialised skill .... The key thing about modern manufacturing technology is that you .... pluck out maybe a furnace, some presses, some machining, inspection, packing, and you put it in a U-shape, and then you look very hard at .... how many times you've got to pick up stuff and put stuff down for it to flow around the circle. And that is basically where the saving is. For instance, in the new cell we're talking about 17 people doing the job that was previously done by 34.

Although Auto Components clearly operates with one of the defining features of hard QM, namely task-based teamworking and functional flexibility within teams, other aspects of hard QM are less well developed. Take, for example, the company's pragmatic approach to the use of just-in-time production techniques:

As for JIT, we are contracted with some suppliers to carry stock .... You have to make a judgement .... With various customers we know it's wise to carry stock .... The response has got to be better than ever .... because [production] schedules are not firm for a week, never mind a month, two months or three months .... and .... the teamworking cell is the best model we've got, with a two-day lead time. (Production Manager)

Another key element of hard QM is the use of a variety of total quality control techniques. Again the company takes a pragmatic approach, and there is a view among some managers that not all TQC methods are useful. In the words of the Sales Manager:

Where quality can be a problem is that it can be very restrictive, so that maybe we have *lost* some of the flexibility that we used to have .... [For example] we have BS5750, which I believe is very restrictive in as much as it's a systems approach, a bureaucratic regime, and you can not move out of that .... In many areas it can be very time consuming for perhaps no reward at all.

Having begun with a clear emphasis on the hard production aspects of QM, Auto Components has since moved to introduce more of the softer aspects. An integrated package of employee communication and involvement measures has been established, with a heavy emphasis on training, and on methods of involving employees more in quality improvement activities. Taken together, the company refers to its overall QM strategy as "continuous on-going improvement" (COI).

Formal quality circle-type involvement groups are called "COI groups". Management see their benefits not just in terms of employee involvement for its own sake, but also in terms of their link to customer satisfaction. As the Quality Manager explained:

If we get a customer complaint, the first thing we do is go out on the shop-floor and get everybody together, including the Production Manager, show all the documentation we've received, fully explain the implications of the complaint, then we will set up what we call a COI team to deal with the problem. This is a good way to respond to a customer's complaint or concern. And I think it helps bond people together, giving them a sense that they have been involved in solving a particular problem. They get the recognition because it's put up on the board. OK there's a bit of glitz about it in the presentation, but the bottom line is that it represents small steps, that never ending improvement.

Apart from formal problem-solving groups, the soft side of the QM programme also includes encouraging shop-floor workers to take greater personal responsibility for the

quality of their work. It is because of this emphasis that the company decided to name its QM programme “COI” rather than “TQM”. As the Engineering Manager explained:

[Auto Components] dropped TQM as a banner and used COI, because it got rid of “management” and it got rid of “quality” from the title. Otherwise it was seen as to do with management and as something to do with the quality department. These were the two things that needed to be dispelled, and now I think people in the factory know that everybody is responsible for quality.

The Union Convenor similarly notes the importance of describing the QM programme in a way that will not immediately alienate the workforce:

The directors .... wanted to put in total quality management, and I said at the time that that has got a ring to it. It’s “total management”, and people look at the words “total” and “management” and it has strange effects on them, so we kicked it around and we came up with “continuous on-going improvement”, which means exactly the same but which people have embraced.

As regards the reasons for the introduction of the QM programme at Auto Components, competitive pressures and rising customer expectations are clearly identified as the major influences. The Manufacturing Manager has 39 years experience at the firm, and in his words:

You’ve got to be quality-oriented because that is the demand of the British motor industry. Whatever car you buy today, they’re all pretty good, there isn’t the “Friday afternoon” one that there used to be .... If we hadn’t embraced statistical process control, if we hadn’t then embraced total quality management, then without a shadow of a doubt this company would not have survived. We had competitors in Germany and all over the world who were taking it on board, and .... we were very fortunate at the time that we had the right MD and the right team of directors to lead the quality campaign.

Indeed, much of the company’s change in fortune is attributed to the role of the Managing Director, who was appointed in 1982 at what was undoubtedly the lowest point in the company’s history. As it entered the 1980s, Auto Components was rapidly losing market share, and a workforce which stood at 1200 in 1979 was over the next two years reduced

to 800, then to 500, and then in 1983 to just 125 people. The vast majority had been made redundant. Many of the managers who were at the company at the time believed it would have to close. Some of them referred to the bad management of that period, and believe that although the new Managing Director was ruthless in reducing the number of employees, it was necessary in the circumstances, and that he was prepared to take the tough decisions that were required to ensure the company's survival. The Union Convenor, who has been with the firm for over 40 years, recalls the situation in 1982 as follows:

At that time I was convinced it was a holding operation, that the people who were left would have another year at the most, and once we had fulfilled the orders we would go as well .... The Sales Director had given him [the MD] the wrong information, and when he analysed it he realised the order load would not sustain 300 people .... and that was when he told me that another 180 had got to go .... And when this Director came back he sacked him on the spot and got him off the site, which was very unusual in those days. And then we lived from hand to mouth virtually, but after about a year we got one or two orders and we could actually see things picking up. And since then it's been one steady growth.

The recollections of the Manufacturing Manager are also worth noting here:

When we got really on our knees in 1982 I actually thought we had gone. It was just sheer survival, there was no finesse, you just had to get them out the door .... And having got them out and survived .... we've been cute enough to manage in a different way .... Gradually, rather than just kicking it out we began to engineer it in. We began to get better machines. And on quality, I can remember a time when if something was out of spec we'd torque it in, and I can remember [the Manufacturing Director] saying 'You're not torqing anything in now. If it isn't right you don't send it'. That was a definite stage forward. Then we introduced SPC, and we gradually started to become more professional.

Aside from cutting staff numbers to the bare minimum, the other strategy of the Managing Director during the early 1980s which is widely seen as having ensured the survival of the company, was his decision to concentrate on a narrow range of products.

The company had been manufacturing cast cylinder liners, cast valve seats and sintered

“shapes”, a mixture of low volume products using highly labour intensive cast production methods. As the Production Manager recalls:

We were like busy fools .... chasing around products when we weren't experts in any of them.

The Managing Director took the decision to shed the cylinder line and “shapes”, and to move progressively away from cast production. The company concentrated on one major product line of valve seat inserts. Currently, Auto Components manufactures approximately 1.1 million valve seats per week, and enjoys a 30% share of the world market; 300,000 of these are made in the new manufacturing unit by around 30 people, with some 120 employees in the older factory making the remaining 800,000. The company is now in a healthy position. It has won three “Q1” awards from Ford. It has won the Queen's Award for Export, and in 1993 was Chrysler “Supplier of the Year” throughout Europe. The management believe they have a comprehensive QM programme in place which will lead to further quality improvements, and thence in turn to a still better market position.

### **3.2 Office Tech**

Office Tech has a very different history and background from Auto Components, and this has heavily influenced the course that QM has taken. Office Tech is a wholly-owned British subsidiary of a Japanese parent company. It was established on a greenfield site in the West Midlands in 1986, and is primarily involved in the manufacture of photocopying machines. The company has had a strong quality ethos from the day it was

established, with the emphasis very much on product quality. Managers throughout the company define quality in terms of providing the customer with a reliable product:

Quality comes first, before cost, before anything else. We interpret quality to mean customer service .... We believe we should give the customer what the customer wants .... We have a quality standard, which we think is very high, and we sell a quality product. (Finance Manager)

The company achieves consistency in the quality of its products through a range of quantifiable production techniques and standards. As the Personnel Director explained:

Being a Japanese company, the quality of the product is absolutely supreme .... But you can only turn out a quality product if you've got quality systems and quality procedures .... We have to make sure that what goes out the door is exactly what it says on the box, and that the first time you use it, it will do it, and the 10,000th, and the 100,000th. If not, then we have to catch that inside with another quality procedure.

Like Auto Components, a key element of the QM strategy at Office Tech is the idea of making continuous improvements to the product. This is embodied in the Japanese principle of "kaizen", which refers to making improvements through small incremental steps. The Finance Manager describes the benefits of this approach as follows:

People hear it and they actually understand it, and they don't have to really change anything they are doing. They can relate to continuous small improvements quite easily, and they don't have to worry about a big target. It's far easier to implement, and it just becomes part of our culture that way.

At Office Tech it is not just production workers who work to such principles. Management also try to ensure that their own decision-making procedures follow an identifiable format which leads to a continual increase in the efficiency of management activities. This is embodied in the "plan-do-check-action" (PDCA) cycle, whereby department heads submit activity plans to the Managing Director on a regular six-monthly basis. Plans involve quantifiable targets which the Managing Director may

amend. Once formally approved, plans are then subject to review six months later before new plans are drawn up. Again, the intention is that this approach becomes taken for granted as part of the normal way of operating:

It sort of rolls on by a step-by-step improvement. So it's a formalised approach that instils something into our culture without people actually realising that that is what they are doing most of the time. They just get used to it. (Finance Manager)

Although Office Tech may employ a broader range of procedures for measuring and quantifying product quality than Auto Components, where it is perhaps less advanced in QM terms is in the organisation of production itself. There are three broad categories of job in the production area: (i) assembly line production of photo-copying machines; (ii) lathing and coating in the drum area; and (iii) batch production of cartridges in the toner plant. The vast majority of production workers are employed in the first of these categories, manning individual work stations on a linear assembly line. There is no cellular manufacturing in this main production area, and thus the scope for functional flexibility between tasks is limited for the majority of employees.

The emphasis of hard QM at Office Tech thus appears to be primarily upon total quality control procedures, whilst at Auto Components there is a greater focus on task-based teamworking. As regards other aspects of hard QM such as just-in-time production, Office Tech follows Auto Components in taking a thoroughly pragmatic approach:

Just-in-time concepts seem good on paper, but with some of the products that we buy it's not possible to operate strictly just-in-time, so we sort of fiddle JIT. We definitely operate it within the factory, so we have no surplus materials in the assembly and process areas, and that is an aid towards quality .... but it becomes more difficult when you go out to suppliers. Our volumes are not massive volumes .... so when we are buying components from Europe (Germany, France, Belgium) we have to think about the economics of shipping the parts, and it would be silly to send parts that distance every day. So probably 80% of the parts



are not delivered just-in-time. But they don't represent very much space anyway, so we buffer it in the warehouse. (Purchasing and Logistics Manager)

Having begun operating with a number of inspection and quality checks to ensure that the product the company were repeat building was exactly the same as that produced in Japan, Office Tech has gradually introduced further TQC procedures onto the production line itself. However, the company still maintains a fairly large quality assurance (QA) division entirely separate from the production facility. Varying degrees of parts inspection are operated. Parts from some 20% of suppliers are not inspected at all and go straight into the warehouse. This occurs where the company has a long history of receiving parts with no problems or rejects. Parts from the other 80% of suppliers are subject to a 3-stage sample inspection process. If ten batches are received and inspected without any defects being found then the AQL ("acceptable quality level") is reduced and only one of the next ten batches is checked. When this procedure has been successfully carried out ten times inspection is then stopped. However, if the QA department receive feedback from the production line to the effect that a non-inspection item contains a defective part, then the process automatically goes back to stage one.

Office Tech works to the principle of "zero defects", so that if one defect is found the whole batch has to be re-checked. This principle is used on incoming parts, on the production line, and on finished goods. Coupled with the "kaizen" principle of continuous improvement, the company believes that this represents a stringent quality standard. As the Purchasing and Logistics Manager explained:

Suppliers .... would say to us that they operate zero defects, but what they really meant was they operated AQL - an "acceptable quality level" - and they would accept one defect, which is not zero. We all know that zero defects is an impossible goal, but you keep striving to get there, and that concept was difficult

to put across to some suppliers. Some rebelled against it and gave us a lot of trouble and are no longer suppliers. And others took it on board and still supply us.

Having had problems with missing parts on photo-copying machines, Office Tech has also introduced a kitting system called “haizen”, based on the Japanese black lacquered lunch-box with its compartmentalised sections. An operator from the warehouse places parts into a series of partitioned boxes, which then travel to the assembly worker with other boxes and trays in a wire-guided vehicle. The operator can only use the parts that he or she is presented with, and so there is no chance of picking an incorrect part from the box.

It would appear, then, that the emphasis of the QM strategy at Office Tech is primarily upon the hard aspects of quantifiable product quality. However, there are softer elements too, although it would be wrong to simply characterise the company as having begun with hard QM and moved progressively to introduce soft QM. Rather, as the Finance Manager explained:

Quality control and quality assurance is a mechanistic approach to quality, whereas other aspects are cultural. In our organisation both came at the same time, but the mechanistic side - being far simpler to understand - advanced much more quickly.

It would certainly appear that the softer elements of QM have become less well established at Office Tech than the hard elements. Even the Senior Personnel Officer, whom one might expect to stress the softer aspects, defines the QM strategy very largely in terms of product quality:

We are concerned .... that what we are doing [in terms of the management of employees] is in some way contemporary and on the right track, but I wouldn't

say there was a conscious move towards a quality environment in management terms, although there definitely is in “quality of product” terms.

Office Tech has experimented with quality circles, and has recently made more rigorous attempts to increase the flow of communication from management to shop-floor operatives. It has also begun to encourage employees to more frequently put forward their own suggestions and ideas for quality improvements. In general, however, progress on the softer aspects of QM remains slow, and the company’s overall QM strategy is defined in large part by the use of hard quantifiable techniques for ensuring consistency in product quality.

### **3.3 New Bank**

New Bank plc is a major financial services institution, employing around 40,000 people across a network of retail banking branches and business centres throughout Britain. In the late 1980s, with competition developing rapidly within the financial services market, the company perceived the need to compete more on quality and to improve the level of customer service. Although not formally committed to the banner headline of “total quality management”, the company’s stated corporate mission is to become “first choice” for customers and staff, and in so doing the quality of customer service is recognised as of paramount importance.

The main driving force behind the introduction of QM at New Bank was the need to gain competitive advantage in a market place where the products on offer are fundamentally the same. In the words of a Branch Manager:

There's been a complete change around, which has been brought about by competitive pressures, because there's a market out there and a lot of financial service institutions all vying for the same business, and we've got to distance ourselves from our competitors, and in my view the only way of doing that is by offering a quality service to the customer.

The same manager indicated that pressures to improve the quality of service are also perceived as coming directly from customers:

People do expect more, and customers are more prepared to tell me that they don't like this or they don't like that. Whereas before .... the bank manager was the king and if he told you to do something you'd do it, now there's not this aura around the bank manager that there used to be.

The QM strategy at New Bank began with an emphasis on the softer elements, instilling in employees the importance of customer service, and "empowering" them to take greater personal responsibility for the quality of service provision. In the mid-1980s a "smile campaign" was initiated, one of the first signs of recognition of the importance of customer service. The company quickly followed this up with the introduction of quality circle-type groups into branches. These were called "quality service action teams" (QSATs), a formalised approach designed to encourage ideas from employees about ways of improving customer service. Since the introduction of QSAT's, it has been increasingly impressed upon employees through a variety of means that they have the freedom themselves to take action to improve customer service, with the aim always to "exceed expectations". Aside from problem-solving groups, New Bank has also introduced a wide range of methods for communicating with employees. These include notice boards, staff circulars, newsletters, management briefings, and an increasing use of video communications.

In general, the QM strategy at New Bank differs from that at Auto Components and Office Tech in that it is focused primarily around the softer aspects of customer service and employee “empowerment”. However, there has recently been an identifiable shift in emphasis away from the purely qualitative aspects of QM and towards a greater focus on measuring and quantifying customer service initiatives.

One example of this trend is the introduction of so-called “mystery shoppers” into branches. Detailed reports are compiled following these visits, providing branch managers with quantifiable data on levels of staff courtesy and efficiency of service. More generally, New Bank is making more stringent attempts to elicit and monitor customer feedback, such as the use of customer questionnaires in branches and offices, which are used to compile an overall “customer satisfaction index” giving scores for individual branches and offices. The overall thrust of the current strategy is characterised by one of the bank’s regional Quality Service Co-ordinators as follows:

In the past this organisation has always viewed itself as trying to get the results but we don’t really mind how we do it. Now it is very much that a quality process is in everything that we do, so we can exceed customer expectations in the best possible way. There is quality in terms of customer service, and quality in terms of internal organisation.

This latter distinction is a useful one. Many of the initiatives for improving customer service introduced in the early stages of the QM strategy at New Bank would fall under the soft or more “qualitative” dimension of QM. However, there has recently been a far greater emphasis on internal organisation. A higher quality of customer service has been sought through changes in the delivery strategy and through a fundamental restructuring of the internal organisation of branches, and these changes have tended to lead to more

quantifiable measurement and standardisation in terms of the organisation of work at the point of service delivery.

In considering these changes, three key aspects need to be highlighted: (i) the re-organisation of branch jobs; (ii) the segmentation of the customer base; and (iii) the standardisation of procedures. The first of these, the re-organisation of branch jobs, has entailed the removal of back-office processing jobs from branches to regional processing centres. The bank is trying to ensure that staff are allocated to those jobs which are most appropriate to them, and in particular that those most suited to customer contact operate on the “front line”:

The bank is trying now to put more of the right people in the right job. If you want to be in the back-office and away from the customers you can. In the past you had to do every single job in the office in order to get on. (Assistant Services Unit Manager)

As for those jobs which are still located in the branches, these have become far more sectionalised. As one Branch Manager describes it:

This branch is now split into a number of sections .... A year ago .... if you had a cashier missing you'd drag someone from another department to help them out. We're very sectionalised now. We've got a cashiers department, a customer services section, a processing unit, a services unit, a lending section, and a technical services unit.

The second key initiative, the segmentation of the customer base, is intended to provide a more specialist service for both corporate and high net-worth personal customers, whose affairs are now dealt with not by their Branch Manager but by Corporate Account Executives and Personal Account Executives at the newly established regional Business

Centres. It is the responsibility of the Branch Manager to identify customers who warrant this higher level of service.

Whilst the branch structure is now left to deal with the mass market, the regional Business Centre included as part of this study deals with the segregated “top end” of customers who have more sophisticated needs. The Business Centre is split into three areas: (i) a Corporate Banking section, which deals with customers with a turnover of over £1m; (ii) a Business Banking section (turnover between £100,000 and £1m); and (iii) a Personal Banking section (covering high net-worth personal customers). A regional Lending Centre has also been looked at in this study. This deals with all correspondence, telephone calls and control situations concerning lending for the whole of one region. It provides support to branches, sanctions facilities for borrowing in excess of the discretion of branch managers, and deals with situations where the bank considers that it may be at risk from borrowing. The intention is to provide a more standardised service than that previously provided through the branch network:

It's been done to provide a more focused quality service in a controlled environment .... Before, a customer may have been dealt with far more leniently in a small branch than in a big city branch, due to the personality of the manager and to other constraints and demands on his time .... We provide a uniform approach to lending. (Lending Centre Manager)

The third key initiative, the standardisation of branch procedures, has resulted from two sources. Firstly, the “Organisation and Methods” department of the bank has established exactly how long it takes to carry out simple branch procedures, and this information is used by section heads within branches when allocating work. Secondly, computer

technology has allowed the simplification of various branch functions, such as the standardisation of lending through “credit scoring”.

Standardisation, however, does not just follow from the introduction of more sophisticated technology. Branches are increasingly designed as a public space for dealing with customers, and for identifying and carrying through sales opportunities. In so doing, procedures for dealing with customers - for example in interview situations - have also been standardised, again in order to provide a more standard service across branches. In a similar way to Office Tech, New Bank is attempting to introduce a greater degree of formalisation and standardisation into management activities. As an Assistant Customer Services Manager explained:

The bank has brought in standards that we have to work to, relating to simple things like opening an account. You will introduce yourself, you will offer the customer a private interview room, you will give them your business card, to actually standardise the way things are done .... although it's got to come across in a genuine way rather than just being repeated parrot fashion.

In summary, the QM strategy at New Bank can be characterised as having started with the soft issues and as having moved more recently to incorporate a far greater emphasis on harder aspects, in terms of the quantifiable measurement of the quality of service provision and levels of customer satisfaction.

### **3.4 Hotel Co**

Hotel Co is a high-profile hotel group with 15 hotels situated throughout the UK. Staff numbers range from around 130 in the eleven full-service hotels to around 30 in the four



smaller limited-facility hotels. In the early 1980s the company began to believe that it could only gain competitive advantage through its service standards surpassing those of other hotels. The QM strategy at Hotel Co is thus similar to that at New Bank in being centred around improvements in customer service.

Hotel Co launched its first “customer care” programme in 1984, based on impressing upon staff in front line positions the importance of providing good customer service. However, the principal defining feature at the beginning of the company’s QM strategy was the introduction at the same time of a comprehensive quality circle initiative, with every hotel in the group being required to set up problem-solving groups. From this initial heavy emphasis on quality circles, Hotel Co has since moved to a more integrated QM strategy, and indeed the early emphasis on quality circles is now seen by many as a mistake. The view of this General Manager is fairly typical:

TQM .... was originally introduced as quality circles, which I think was one of the early errors. The whole attitude was that if you had quality circles then you were running a TQM hotel, and if you didn’t you weren’t. Now we know it’s a lot more than that. It’s the way we treat our suppliers, our customers, our staff. Quality circles aren’t everything. They are just one aspect.

Having introduced and operated quality circles throughout the company for a period of some two or three years, Hotel Co moved to a fuller QM strategy in the late 1980s. The company took two years planning and developing a thoroughgoing TQM programme, largely under the personal guidance of the Managing Director. The programme includes not just an emphasis on employee involvement in problem solving through formal quality circle meetings, but also a central focus on empowering staff to take greater personal responsibility for the standard of service provided in the hotels.

The principles of this empowerment were embodied in a second “customer care” programme. Whilst New Bank aims to encourage their staff to “exceed the expectations” of customers, Hotel Co named this second initiative “whatever it takes”, the principle being to encourage staff to do precisely that in order to ensure that customers leave the hotel with a positive impression and with the intention of returning.

As regards the reasons for moving to a QM strategy, managers at Hotel Co reflect the views of managers in the other three case study companies by stressing the role of competitive pressures, and in particular the need to gain a competitive edge through focusing on quality in a market place where the products on offer to the customer are fundamentally the same:

We used to talk about customer care and talk about service, but we always solved everything by adding another bit of product. And in the end we’d filled the rooms up with so much stuff you couldn’t fill them up anymore. (General Manager)

In terms of the product there’s only so much you can do: *en suite* bathrooms, double beds, direct dial phones, tea and coffee, TVs, swimming pools, jacuzzis. There really isn’t a lot else you can do to the product apart from very little things, so the only thing that will give you an edge is the quality of service, and that brings you to TQM. (General Manager)

Again, managers at Hotel Co also perceive pressures to improve the quality of service as coming directly from customers:

People want a lot more for a lot less now. Before in hotels you could charge people the earth and they would pay it. Now we have to offer good quality at a competitive price .... People bargain when they come here .... and they won’t pay for things that aren’t up to standard now. (Assistant General Manager)

Hotel Co is now beginning to put more and more emphasis on measuring and monitoring the effectiveness of its QM strategy, and attempts are being made to utilise customer

feedback to greater effect. As at New Bank, there is an identifiable trend towards the use of more quantitative quality indicators, although these are not currently as well developed. One example is the desire to have standardised procedures for dealing with customers, so as to ensure a consistent level of service across hotels. As an Assistant General Manager explained:

TQM is mostly to do with customers .... People perceive that if they stay at one [Hotel Co] hotel it will be exactly the same as the others, and people like continuity. And that's what I perceive as the real reason for quality in this company.

However, despite some moves towards the harder aspects of QM, the central defining feature of the QM strategy at Hotel Co remains that of "employee empowerment". Giving employees greater autonomy and discretion over decision-making is perceived to be of benefit for customers and employees alike. And in turn, the company believe that such an approach will have very real benefits in economic terms:

Quality is not just good for customer service. It's also good for the staff. People enjoy having a say in things. In the past it's always been managers who've made all the decisions. Now we are saving so much money by using our resources better. (Assistant General Manager)

It would seem, however, that widening the scope of employee discretion has not in fact led, as yet, to such economic savings. Or to put it rather differently, if financial savings are being made in the company, it would appear that these are less the result of the TQM programme and more the result of a return to focusing more on price than quality of service. As one General Manager told me:

A lot more of our industry is price-driven now, and people are looking for the best deal .... Over the last two years quality has become secondary .... Now it's still about maintaining levels of service, but price is everything .... It's become a price-driven negotiation rather than a quality of service deal .... Maybe when we get back to making some money .... TQM will take a higher profile again.

This example from Hotel Co raises the general question of when is the best time to introduce a QM strategy based around the notion of “employee empowerment”. It may be argued that in a period of economic downturn and high unemployment the conditions are favourable for the introduction of any new management strategy, since employees have far less scope for resistance to it. On the other hand, such conditions may force managements to reduce the scope of employee discretion where it has financial implications, and thus weaken the extent of empowerment. This would certainly seem to have been the case at Hotel Co:

TQM .... was launched amid a great deal of publicity and senior management commitment, and loads of money being thrown at it, with big gala dinners to celebrate “circle of the year” and all that. And then we hit the recession, and from having people working with a huge amount of enthusiasm, all of a sudden .... you just grabbed hold of the purse strings and pulled them right in .... which obviously demotivated people. (General Manager)

This debate turns, of course, on the point raised in the Chapter One about whether managements are actually concerned about genuine empowerment or whether they are merely concerned to elicit the appropriate employee behaviour. If the former is the case, then recessionary conditions may indeed hinder such aspirations. But if the latter is the case, then management may be able to continue with the appearance of providing quality customer service whilst being afforded still greater control over employees.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the nature of the QM strategy at each of the four case study companies. The approach of each company has been described in terms of the hard and soft dimensions outlined in Chapter One. We have seen how the strategy of the two

manufacturing firms is based primarily on hard QM, whilst perhaps unsurprisingly the QM initiatives at the two service sector organisations began with an emphasis on the softer elements. However, it is also apparent that both of these two companies have progressively moved to introduce greater quantifiable measurement of quality. Such moves have clear implications for the organisation of work, and thus for the nature and extent of employee involvement and discretion, and the responses of employees to these initiatives are reported in detail in subsequent chapters.

The next five chapters, which constitute the main substantive body of the thesis, present a thematic analysis of employee attitudes and perceptions. Firstly, consideration is given to how employees have perceived the attempt to engage them through QM, and the extent to which they are being engaged through both formal and informal methods (Chapters Four, Five and Six). Following this, an examination is made of the extent of any downside for employees in terms of increasing management control (Chapters Seven and Eight). The analysis begins in the next chapter with a critical assessment of employee attitudes towards the ideology of quality management at each of the four organisations.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION AND THE IDEOLOGY OF QUALITY**

In Chapter One QM was defined at its most basic level as representing a “commitment to quality principles”, and we have seen in the previous chapter some of the different forms that QM can take. But how is employee commitment to quality to be generated? I have suggested that a range of HRM-style policies can be used in an effort to secure the support and motivation of employees. But how does this happen in practice? Is a strong corporate culture a necessary pre-requisite to the establishment of genuine employee commitment? And what scope for strategic choice do managers have in attempting to implement cultural change? These are some of the questions considered in this chapter, which examines how managers at each of the four organisations have attempted to define and communicate a strong quality message.

Management commitment is seen as crucial in the development of a quality culture (Lascelles and Dale, 1994; Oakland, 1993; Williams *et al.*, 1993), and so some attention is also given to the consequences of disagreements and inconsistencies in management thinking. Proponents of QM also stress the potential which it has to transform employee values. But how can such transformations be validated? Does commitment to QM imply a radical change in values, or is it more likely to reflect - as Ogbonna (1992-1993) suggests - a more practical awareness of business realities? Moreover, can employee commitment be sustained in a climate of uncertainty and job losses? Have differences emerged in employee attitudes since QM was first introduced, and how do we account for

changes in employee commitment to QM over time? These questions are also briefly considered.

This chapter thus examines one of the defining features of “soft QM” at each case study company; namely, the ways in which management have attempted to communicate the QM strategy to employees, and in so doing convince employees of the importance of product quality, customer satisfaction and continuous improvement. Whilst the managers themselves describe the ideological aspects of QM in each case, the main focus of the chapter is an analysis of employee perceptions.

The chapter is split into three sections: in the first, the different methods each company uses for communicating the central tenets of the QM strategy are analysed; in the second, an examination is made of employees’ more general attitudes to organisational change, as well as their views on levels of trust and loyalty at each company; and in the final section, the main themes of the chapter are pulled together, and an explanation is given of the reasons for variations in levels of employee commitment to the ideology of QM between the four companies.

## **4.1 Communication and the Ideology of QM**

### **4.1.1 Auto Components**

Auto Components employs a wide range of methods for communicating quality-related issues to employees. Perhaps primary among these is the widespread use of notice boards

throughout the whole factory. These take two forms: works notice boards and specifically COI-related notice boards. As the Training and Safety Officer explained:

We use the notice boards a lot for communicating with people. If there are problems we want people to attend to, if someone new joins the company, anything that is out of the ordinary that people need to know about we put on the notice boards. Any audits that we have - Rover or Jaguar - any results from these or from health and safety surveys, anything like that goes on the notice boards, good or bad.

A second key method for communicating the values of the organisation to employees is the use of employee briefings. These are held once every month, and involve one of the Production Directors taking a selected group of employees away from the shop-floor and briefing them in detail about a particular issue. The minutes of these meetings are then displayed on a factory notice board. Thirdly, there is a twice-yearly address by the Managing Director to all employees, once in June and once in December, at which any broader difficulties that the company may be facing are communicated to the workforce. And fourthly, the company have recently produced an in-house magazine called "Quality Matters", and employ a part-time editor who works one morning a week compiling each issue.

Aside from these specific techniques for communicating information to employees, use is made of the management chain, and managers are actively encouraged to go on to the shop-floor and talk to employees. The company believes that this fosters a closer understanding between the two levels, and allows the importance of quality and continuous improvement to be reinforced:

In the past we had this "them and us" situation because people didn't see managers walking about in factories .... We try and encourage middle



management to go out on to the shop-floor [and] see how things operate. (Sales Manager)

Although the company operates a range of formal communication methods, in general management behaviour is characterised by a degree of openness and informality. Again, this reflects a belief that new initiatives are more likely to be accepted if the “business realities” underlying their introduction are made apparent. The Union Convenor certainly believes that employees appreciate this approach:

Everyone fears that anything new is going to cost him his job .... We eliminate that, or try to .... [For example] the engineering department now talk openly to people and say ‘Look, we’re thinking of doing this’, and they get their views on it. So people know what’s coming.

As well as top-down forms of communication, links across departments are also valued and encouraged. In the words of the Manufacturing Manager:

The military structure of the private talking to the sergeant, who talks to the lieutenant, who talks to the captain, who talks to the colonel, who then crosses over to the other regiment and talks to the colonel who passes it right the way down again. No. Here two privates meet and they talk to each other. Interface is the key.

Before being asked about the specific communication methods that the company uses, employees at Auto Components were firstly asked to say whether they thought the extent of this communication had increased during the last five years (Table 4.1). The majority clearly felt that it had. As regards the different methods used (Table 4.2), notice boards were clearly considered to be the most useful, with two-thirds describing them as “very successful”. The six-monthly address from the Managing Director also scored highly, although the more regular informal communication on the shop-floor was considered less successful.

Employees were then asked if the use of these communication methods had increased the level of trust between themselves and management (Table 4.3). Two-thirds said that they had increased trust either to a “fairly large extent” or a “very large extent”, and employees generally made positive comments about management in this regard, such as:

Since I’ve been here management have never given me any reason to disbelieve what they say. Honesty has always been 100%, even on bad things like redundancies. Secrecy was always a problem in other companies I’ve worked for.

The issues of trust and loyalty towards the organisation are returned to in more detail later in this chapter.

As regards the existence of a definable culture of quality at the company, managers certainly believe that they need to recruit people who are quality conscious and who are able to understand the principles behind the COI programme. In the words of the Production Manager:

It’s a person’s mind that we’re after, who’s adaptable to the changes that the company wants. Those are the people we want.

Indeed, many managers spoke of the difficulty of finding people who fit in with the culture of the organisation, and said that mistakes had been made recently in recruitment.

The views of the Finance Manager are typical:

It is relatively easy to get people with the qualifications to do the job. The difficult bit is finding someone who fits in with the principles under which the company operates. Of the people we have recruited in the past few years, we’ve made quite a number of mistakes in terms of our assessment of the people and the way we thought they would fit in .... Although they have been technically qualified, they really haven’t been able to fit in with the [Auto Components] way, so there have been quite a number of personnel changes, with people coming for a relatively short period of time.

So, what exactly *is* the “Auto Components way”? Essentially, employees at Auto Components could be said to have adopted the culture of the organisation if: firstly, they recognise the importance in competitive and business terms of continuous improvements in the quality of the product and of work processes; and secondly, they are - in light of this recognition - willing to do what is deemed necessary in order to contribute to these improvements. Central in the latter respect is an acceptance of flexibility and of the need to work with others. Management believe they have been largely successful in disseminating an ideology which reinforces the importance of employee commitment to continuous improvement. The essence of this new employee commitment is implicit in the words of the Training and Safety Officer when summing up the changes he has witnessed since the COI programme was introduced:

The thing that sticks out in my experience over the period we've been doing this is the change in attitude .... When I came to the company I detected quite a bit of resistance, cynicism, quite a few hard attitudes to what was going on .... The first six guys to go into the cell were .... seen as management stooges .... What is clear is that attitudes are changing .... In the other traditional machining areas .... they perceive their jobs as being under threat .... [and] they're actually coming on board with the new thoughts and ideas .... Previously they were very dogmatic, but they see the necessity now I think. The technology is changing, productivity improvements, we're looking at a whole range of things in the traditional areas to speed up production, and they see that the only way to maintain their jobs is to actually change with the technology.

In general, managers at Auto Components believe that the company would have found it easier to have achieved a workforce fully committed to the ideology of QM if it had been established on a greenfield site. The Training and Safety Officer, who has primary responsibility for recruitment policy, reflects this view when he says:

We are hampered in some ways by the workforce that we've got .... On a greenfield site you'll have a profile of a person who's young and fit, you'll attract him by offering good pay and conditions, you'll interview and do psychometric and occupational tests, and so you'll pick people with the right aptitudes and

abilities for teamworking .... What you've got there is the raw material to work with, whereas in a company like ours we have to work with the material we've got.

Moreover, it is not just in personnel terms but also in "hardware" terms that the company is seen as being disadvantaged by being located on a mature brownfield site:

[We have] .... manufacturing plants that are not easily convertible to modern flow-line production. They're not tall enough. You can't get craneage in. So maybe at the end of the day some of our traditional plants might need knocking down and starting again. (Training and Safety Officer)

These views make an interesting contrast with those held by managers at Office Tech - reported later in the chapter - who also tend to highlight the disadvantages, again in both personnel and "hardware" terms, of operating on a *greenfield* site.

The views of employees at Auto Components reflect a generally high level of awareness and commitment to the principles of QM as disseminated by management. All employees appear to attach a great deal of importance to the concept of "quality improvement". When asked to define the concept, most employees referred to the quality of the product and to the need to supply a quality product to customers in order to secure orders and boost competitiveness (Table 4.4).

These themes of "quality" and "customer satisfaction" also scored highly when employees were asked to rate certain key concepts in the discourse of QM in terms of their level of awareness among the workforce, with 94% and 86% respectively describing these two concepts as either being subject to a "very high level of awareness" or as being "built in to everything that workers do" (Table 4.5).

When then asked which factors they considered the success of the company most depended upon, 72% of employees at Auto Components rated “methods of ensuring consistent quality” as in the highest category. Interestingly, however, a slightly higher proportion (80%) rated the “ability to compete on price” in the same category (Table 4.6), something which we will see later is not reflected in the attitudes of employees at the other three companies.

We have seen, then, that managers at Auto Components employ a wide range of different methods for communicating the QM strategy to the workforce. A clear message is disseminated which reinforces the importance of employee commitment to continuous improvement, and an open style of management is encouraged so as to facilitate a two-way dialogue. Employees generally demonstrate high levels of awareness and commitment to espoused QM principles, particularly those of “quality” and “customer satisfaction”, and many of the comments made on the questionnaire returns reflect an appreciation of the links between the two. Typical among these were:

Improving quality and reducing scrap allows you to produce at a cheaper rate. And this will affect my wage packet and give me more job security.

If I buy something I don't want it breaking down every five minutes. Our customers want the same.

#### 4.1.2 Office Tech

The approach to QM at Office Tech involves far less of a commitment to formal communication methods than does that at Auto Components. Management certainly believe there is a strong quality culture within the organisation. However, there is very

little communication via notice boards, newsletters are used infrequently, and there is no in-house company magazine. Communication of quality-related issues is instead primarily through the management chain. The Managing Director gives a presentation to the whole workforce every two months, which is then filtered down for discussion through a series of team briefings and more informal meetings. As the Senior Personnel Officer explained:

[We use] mass communication methods, the boss getting up in front of the whole workforce and telling us what's going on .... [In this way] people are given a fair bit of information, and told what is happening in corporate terms. If we are having a new product, if orders are low, business objectives are offered to the workforce in very simple terms .... so they can apply some activity in their section to the greater goal .... The Managing Director stands up every two months and then the information detail is disseminated down through line management.

When employees at Office Tech were asked if they felt that the extent of management communication had increased over the last five years, most said that it had, although a relatively small proportion (29%) chose to say that there was now a “great deal more” communication, compared with 42% who said this at Auto Components (Table 4.1). As regards which forms of communication employees considered the most useful, both newsletters and notice boards scored markedly lower than at Auto Components. Team briefings scored highest, with just over half of the sample describing them as “very successful” (Table 4.2).

As to whether the use of these forms of communication had increased the level of trust between shop-floor employees and managers, 45% of employees said that they had done so either to a “very large extent” or to a “fairly large extent” (Table 4.3). However, this figure is somewhat lower than the corresponding figure of 66% at Auto Components.

Moreover, over one-fifth of employees at Office Tech report management communication to have had no effect at all on increasing trust (compared with just 2% who say this at Auto Components).

The ideology of QM at Office Tech reflects the strong emphasis on product quality at the heart of the QM strategy, as described in the previous chapter. As at Auto Components, managers say that one of the problems they face is trying to recruit people with the requisite quality consciousness:

The one area that we have a problem with is trying to persuade newcomers to the company that this *is* the culture .... Where we fail is getting the message to everybody from day one that everything we do and they do is contributory to quality. They think at times that it is over-the-top, or too detailed, and we fail to get our message through. We fail as an organisation to demonstrate to the workforce that if we don't, it is your job and my job at stake. (Personnel Director)

As for what the corporate culture at Office Tech consists of, the Senior Personnel Officer made the following general point:

When you talk about modern management concepts like “empowerment”, “involvement” and “participation”, these are all built in to the culture of the organisation as a matter of course.

More specifically, the culture is one which stresses above all else the importance of consistency in product quality. All opportunities are taken through the management chain and team briefings to reinforce this maxim, and to encourage the adoption of QM ideas on the production line, such as for example the notion of the “internal customer”:

We try and instil through our culture that in every step of the organisation the next person in the chain is a customer. So, down on the assembly line, if you are on station 1 then station 2 is your customer. (Finance Manager)

The nature of the quality culture at Office Tech, and the reasons why it is in many ways seen as problematic by management, can only be understood by considering the influence of the Japanese parent company. The culture of quality as it exists today, whilst continuing to adapt, still reflects strongly the management principles laid down by the Japanese when the company was set up. The parent company produced a “mission statement” when Office Tech was established. This included reference to the “sanai principle”, which exhorts employees to love their neighbour and love their work. Less dramatically, it stressed the importance of measurable consistency in both product quality and management procedures. According to many of the senior managers at the company today, the parent company wanted the British plant to be almost an exact replica of the Tokyo factory, not only in technological terms but also in terms of management practices. And it is this which many feel led to an inevitable “culture clash”. The views of the Finance Manager are typical:

The cultural side was brought in at the beginning in this company .... The Japanese come in and they have these very good ideas, proven in Japan .... but where they fall down, I believe, is that they are just bolted on as if it was a Japanese factory. They fall down in the translation .... The British workers are not the same as the Japanese workers .... There is a cultural difference .... We have tried to instil this cultural thing of “customer service”, and if you asked them [the employees] all about it they would know what it was and give you the same answer, but whether they actually practice it or not is not so assured. And so we have found over the years that we have bolted on things and made them work, but they are not really in the fabric of the company, and so as soon as you stop applying the pressure it drifts away or collapses .... The things they do in Japan, like quality circles and suggestion schemes, all these sorts of ideas we have tried and failed at least once on them because we have simply taken the Japanese model and just applied it .... Teamwork and team building was another one that I think we failed on.



A number of managers believe that one of the causes of this problem is that too many Japanese managers were put in to line management positions when the company was set up. According to the Senior Personnel Officer:

They should have been used for the thing they were best at, which was their technical skills .... It caused a lot of problems having a Japanese line manager in charge of British under-managers, a lot of friction. And the other mistake is that a lot of the Japanese methods were brought here and offered in a pure form without any conditioning, and there was a massive clash of cultures.

As well as dominating line management positions, all of the more senior positions - including personnel - were also filled by Japanese managers when the company was first established. The current senior personnel manager (who is British) believes that this served to prevent any flexibility being introduced into personnel practices:

We accept that it's Japanese technology, but it's 97% British people, so let's operate personnel in a way the British people understand .... When Nissan set up they brought in a British Personnel Director from day one .... [to] bring in things which he knew worked in a British culture. Here, we tried to impose Japanese ideas .... If we'd have set this place up with a Japanese Production Manager, a Japanese Technical Manager etc., but a *British* Personnel Manager, with freedom to operate, then I think we would have been .... much further ahead than we are now, because we are still trying to remove some of the rigid Japanese cultural personnel policies. (Personnel Director)

So, what exactly *are* these "rigid Japanese cultural personnel policies"? When pressed to give examples, most managers referred either to policies on pay or to decision-making procedures. As regards pay, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven, the parent company insisted that Office Tech used a form of pay determination for all shop-floor operatives based on the assumption of a normal distribution. This caused a great deal of disquiet among the workforce and has subsequently been abandoned after pressure from many of the British managers to have it removed. Criticism was also levelled at the parent company's approach to pay determination for staff grades. When a

staff member joins the company in Japan he has an expectation of staying there for the remainder of his working life. Consequently, his starting salary will be low, but he is likely to accept this because he knows that if he stays and progresses steadily he can forecast his rise in earnings and plan ahead. If he then subsequently decides to leave the company, he is considered to have shown a lack of loyalty, and can not expect to join another company at the same pay level; rather, he would be expected to start again on a low salary. When the parent company wanted the British subsidiary to adopt a similar policy on starting salaries, conflict was inevitable:

They would try and do this here. They would say 'We do not know his loyalty. We can't pay him £13,000. We start them at £6,000'. And we'd say 'Well, you won't get him'. (Personnel Director)

Similar tensions arose over the insistence by the parent company that Office Tech operate a form of "consensus decision-making". Many managers felt that this led to inefficiencies because it takes longer to reach decisions if all line managers are required to have an input:

In some ways that's democracy .... but on the other hand it's absolutely ridiculous, because all these non-experts cloud what you are trying to do. (Senior Personnel Officer)

They [the Japanese] make decisions collectively rather than individually .... They will sit down and think about a problem even if it takes 2 or 3 days. You may come out with the right solution, but by that time you've lost the initiative in a lot of cases. (Production Manager)

Essentially, then, it is the rigidity with which certain ideas and practices were introduced that has led to a significant amount of tension between managers at Office Tech. As the Personnel Director recalls:

I sat in a management meeting after I'd been here for about a year, and I said 'Right, let's take the core of it, and then let us give our managers discretion'. And

one Japanese manager asked 'Can we have rules about the discretion'? I think that about sums it up.

Despite these various problems that have occurred in applying Japanese management practices within the British plant, managers at Office Tech also identify some clear advantages for the workforce which come from the Japanese legacy. Not least among these is the general lack of short-termism in management thinking, which leads - for example - to the insistence that the company sticks firmly to a policy of "no compulsory redundancies":

You are encouraged to think long-term. And the Japanese accept the ups and downs of business. We don't have an instant "brown envelope syndrome". We almost made a loss in 1991, and a message came from Tokyo to say 'OK, but you made a profit in the first five years, so why not use some of those profits to tide you over in the bad times?' This is the very positive side. (Personnel Director)

As regards whether Office Tech benefits from operating on a greenfield site, most managers expressed the view that it does not, either in terms of the physical environment or in personnel terms. On the former, the Finance Manager made the following point:

[There was a] narrowness of view at the start. [The parent company] wanted a factory to do certain things, and so it specifically built a factory to do certain things. And as time passes it is difficult to introduce some of the changes required .... So we have some specific hardware that is not adaptable to change.

And on the latter issue of personnel practices, he suggested:

Again we came in with some preconceived ideas. We wanted a young workforce. We had good theories as to why, but again we've had lots of problems, very high labour turnover, because a younger workforce is very mobile and will move down the road for as little as £5 a week difference in wage .... We also recruited people - even at more senior levels - who were ideal to set up a greenfield site, but who perhaps didn't have the skills to maintain a mature production environment, so we found that the changes we've encountered have been more severe than a brownfield site would have encountered.

The central importance of product quality within the ideology of QM at Office Tech is certainly reflected in employee attitudes. Overall, the concept of “quality improvement” is judged to be the “single most important issue in the company” by 37% of employees (Table 4.4). Although this is smaller than the corresponding figure of 56% at Auto Components, when asked how they defined “quality improvement” a higher proportion at Office Tech referred specifically to product quality (53% as compared with 44%).

As at Auto Components, the terms “quality” and “customer satisfaction” scored highest when employees were asked to rank various concepts in terms of their level of awareness among the workforce (Table 4.5). However, the numbers at Office Tech giving these terms the highest ranking were somewhat lower than at Auto Components (46% and 36% respectively, compared with 50% and 70%).

When then asked on which factors the success of the company most depended, Office Tech employees ranked “methods of ensuring consistent quality” highest by some margin (66% describing it as “of paramount importance”), with both “use of the latest technology” and the “ability to compete on price” scoring significantly less well than among employees at Auto Components (Table 4.6).

In summary, managers at Office Tech make less use of formal communication techniques than do their counterparts at Auto Components. However, despite evident disagreements over the desirability of influence from the parent company, they are nonetheless committed to disseminating a strong ideology which is based around the central importance of product quality. Employees at Office Tech show a correspondingly lower

level of awareness of management communication than do those at Auto Components. They are also less likely to feel that there has been an increase in trust between themselves and managers as a result of communication initiatives. However, they do demonstrate a keen awareness of the key principle of product quality, as reflected in the following comments:

Quality means getting every machine that leaves the factory with zero productive defects.

In order to produce a product of good quality the manufacturing process must be almost fool-proof, and to achieve this each and every employee must be quality conscious.

If the product is not good it would not sell, and we would not be employed.

#### 4.1.3 New Bank

New Bank uses a number of different methods for communicating with employees, and a central part of the QM strategy has been to utilise these methods more fully, so as to raise the profile of ideas such as “quality of service” and “customer satisfaction”. General information has been communicated through staff circulars and notice boards for a number of years. More recently, the bank has made increasing use of video communications in an attempt to put across key elements of its “vision” in a modern and professional manner.

Apart from these initiatives, the primary means of face-to-face communication in the bank are the regular communications meetings, which are usually held on Wednesday mornings in branches. These involve a senior manager giving a brief presentation,

followed by a question and answer session at which staff are free to raise any issues that concern them. New Bank also encourages managers to be more “open” towards staff by spending as much time as they can out of their offices and among the other employees, both behind the counter and in the public space.

Employees at New Bank have certainly been aware of the recent rapid increase in the extent of communication. Table 4.1 shows that 62% consider management to be communicating a “great deal more” than five years ago (compared with corresponding figures of 42% and 29% at Auto Components and Office Tech respectively). As for which forms of communication are considered the most useful, the regular communications meetings are considered to be “very successful” by 45% of employees. Informal means of communication are similarly popular (48% saying they are “very successful”). However, a mixed reaction is given to the increasing use of video communications; whilst 34% describe them as “very successful”, over one-quarter of employees deem them to be either of “little use” or of “no use at all” (Table 4.2).

As to whether the use of these forms of communication has increased the level of trust between employees and managers, the results are similar to those at Office Tech (Table 4.3), with 45% of employees saying that they had done so either to a “very large extent” or to a “fairly large extent” (the corresponding figure at Office Tech is also 45%), and with 17% reporting that management communication has had no effect at all on increasing trust (the figure at Office Tech is 21%).

The previous chapter described the essential elements of the QM strategy at New Bank, highlighting the restructuring in the nature of service delivery, and stressing the central aim of the bank as to become “first choice” for customers and staff. In attempting to do so, a great deal of importance is attached to the quality of customer service. These twin concepts of “customer satisfaction” and “first choice” can be regarded as the fundamental elements of the ideology of QM at New Bank.

The impact of this new culture of quality improvement and customer satisfaction can only be adequately understood if one firstly considers the nature of the old corporate culture which it is fast replacing. Rapid technological advances and tighter market conditions are at present co-existing somewhat uneasily with the traditional, conservative environment in which many New Bank employees began their careers. Coupled with this, the flattening of organisational hierarchies and the attempts to “empower” clerical grade employees to take greater responsibility has meant that the old corporate culture of deference and loyalty is rapidly breaking up.

Many employees at New Bank are sceptical about the new quality culture and feel threatened by the pace of change. This is perhaps especially the case among managerial grades. There have been large-scale job losses at the bank in recent years, with many managers taking voluntary severance. As for the majority of staff, the company realises that not everyone will be committed to the new ideology, but it is nevertheless determined to push ahead with the changes which it considers are necessary, and does not intend to be over-accommodating with those who do not fall into line with the direction

of change. As one of the managers charged with promoting the new ideas within a particular region of the bank explained:

It is going to be quite a cultural change for a lot of people. There is a big body of people who see the benefits of it but are uncertain about how it is going to happen. But at the same time there are a lot of people who are dragging behind and who are critical. The bank can deal with these people in a variety of ways .... The message will be 'Get on board please. This is the way we are going to go. If you feel uncomfortable then don't get in the way or get off board'. A lot of these people have views that are very sensible, but they are not really in tune with the way the bank wants to go at the moment. (Quality Service Co-ordinator)

Managers at branch level are perhaps somewhat more realistic about the reasons for the varying degrees of buy-in to the new ideas among clerical staff:

There are a lot of people who are very sceptical about the "vision" of the bank as "first choice", very cynical about the whole thing, and thinking 'We've heard it all before' and 'It's just a new buzz-word'. And there are a lot of people who have always put the customer first and who say 'I've always done that'. So there's a mixture. I think everybody is generally on board with what we are trying to do, but there's scepticism about whether we can achieve it or not, scepticism because we've tried it before. (Branch Manager)

The exhortation to "put the customer first" is certainly pushed by New Bank above all else, and the increase in management communication described previously is primarily aimed to convince employees that quality of service to the customer is paramount. Quantitative data suggest that employees at New Bank do see "quality improvement" as important, and they also define it largely in terms of customer satisfaction and "supplying what the customer wants" (Table 4.4). Indeed, the number defining quality improvement in these terms (68%) is far higher than the corresponding numbers at the two manufacturing companies (28% of employees do so in the new shop at Auto Components, and only 6% at Office Tech).



However, when asked to rate key QM concepts in terms of their level of awareness among the workforce, employees at New Bank are somewhat less positive than those at the two manufacturing firms (Table 4.5). Although “customer satisfaction” scores highest, with exactly one-third of employees ranking it in the first of six categories, the numbers who do the same at Auto Components and Office Tech are higher (70% and 36% respectively). Similarly, “quality” scores next highest, with 23% ranking it in the top category, but again the corresponding figures are higher at Auto Components and Office Tech (50% and 46% respectively).

When asked finally in this section which factors they considered the success of the company most depended upon, “methods of ensuring consistent quality”, “use of the latest technology” and “the efforts of individual employees” all scored highly, as they did at the two manufacturing firms (Table 4.6). Two other factors, however, were considered considerably less important by New Bank employees. These were: firstly, “the ability to compete on price” (19% describing it as of “paramount importance” compared with 80% and 48% at Auto Components and Office Tech respectively); and, secondly, “economic factors beyond the company’s control” (only 2% describing it as of “paramount importance”, compared with 34% and 23%).

Although this quantitative data on the extent of employee commitment to the new ideology of quality at New Bank is perhaps somewhat ambiguous, it does suggest that whilst employees are aware of the importance of these ideas, they are not convinced that they are being adopted with much enthusiasm among their colleagues. The comments which employees made next to these questions on their questionnaires certainly backs up

this interpretation, suggesting that employees recognise the importance of providing a quality customer service, and are committed to doing so, but feel that the pace of change has been too quick and that the level of customer service has actually fallen. Typical comments were:

The bank is going through a major change. But things are happening too fast, and not enough thought has been put into the implementation of these changes .... We have been pushed from pillar to post, given targets to reach, sales to make, and double the workload and responsibility. The result will surely show that quality of service has fallen.

I have heard a lot of talk, but do not feel that the new ideas and culture have yet been put into place.

In particular, the lack of adequate numbers of staff in front line positions is identified by many employees as one of the primary reasons why the QM strategy has failed so far to deliver a substantially higher level of customer service:

We all still want to provide a quality service, completing work and selling. If we had the right amount of staff, this would not mean that we would sit back and not work, but we would have the time to improve systems and do more for sales.

The “vision” is a good idea in theory, but in practice it can not be carried out due to inadequate staffing levels.

To sum up, there has evidently been a substantial increase in management communication at New Bank since the QM strategy was introduced, and managers have been encouraged to adopt a more open and approachable style with staff. The ideological aspects of the QM strategy are encapsulated in the bank’s “vision”, which stresses above all else the importance of quality of service delivery and customer satisfaction. The picture emerging, however, is that although employees have certainly been aware of the concerted attempt to engage their commitment to the “vision”, many of them show a

marked scepticism about the new quality culture, feeling that the pace of change has been too rapid, and that their own concerns have been given inadequate consideration.

#### 4.1.4 Hotel Co

Hotel Co uses a variety of methods for communicating the principles of the QM strategy to employees. Quarterly meetings involving all of the staff in a particular hotel have been used by the company for a number of years. More recently they have been increasingly used as a vehicle for disseminating and discussing information relating to the TQM programme. Managers generally regard them as highly beneficial:

We've always had quarterly staff meetings, and if people were around they'd come. Now we get easily more than half of the staff turn up .... because it's so informative now. (Personnel and Training Manager)

More frequent forms of communication at the hotels include team briefings and the widespread use of notice boards, which report quality circle activities as well as displaying quantitative data on performance against targets for various customer satisfaction indices. As part of the TQM programme, Hotel Co has also produced an in-house magazine called "Quality Times", which is distributed to all hotels on a monthly basis.

As for more informal methods of communication, Hotel Co follows New Bank in encouraging managers to be more "open" towards employees and to spend more of their time with their staff in the public space. Managers certainly feel that this has happened, and that it has benefited both employees and themselves:

It's a lot more open now. There isn't a big divide between management and staff. It's more like one team. (Assistant General Manager)

As for management style, we've moved a lot closer to the employees, and a lot closer to getting our hands dirty and getting stuck in .... It would have been very difficult to have managed through the tough times we've had from the ivory tower. We wouldn't have been able to motivate people or to ask for favours. (General Manager)

Employees at Hotel Co are clearly aware of the big increase in management communication since the QM strategy was implemented, with 55% saying there is now a "great deal more" communication than five years ago (Table 4.1). This is slightly less than the corresponding figure of 62% at New Bank, but is significantly higher than those at the two manufacturing firms. As regards the different communication methods used, team briefings and quarterly meetings were considered the most useful, with 60% and 56% respectively describing these as "very successful" (Table 4.2).

On the issue of trust, one-third of employees at Hotel Co said that these forms of communication had increased the level of trust between management and employees to a "very large extent" (Table 4.3). This is by some way the largest proportion of employees saying this from across the four case study companies (it is three times more than the 11% who gave the same answer at New Bank). Moreover, Hotel Co is the only company where no employees are of the view that trust has "not increased at all" (the proportion who think this at New Bank is 17%).

A key aspect of the TQM programme at Hotel Co is the promotion of a definable culture of quality within the organisation, based on the principles of "customer satisfaction" and of employees being "empowered" to do what is necessary to provide a quality service. As

at the two manufacturing case study companies, managers stressed the importance of recruiting people who are likely to understand and take on board these ideas. As a Personnel and Training Manager explained:

The type of person we employ has changed now, and it's a responsibility of mine to actually find people that fit into the TQ concept more, and who have skills that are a wee bit different .... We bring it into interviews, the fact that people will be involved and they will be expected to make decisions and take responsibility for their own actions, because it doesn't suit everybody.

Just as managers at branch level at New Bank are keenly aware of the difficulty of instilling in employees a genuine commitment to "exceeding the expectations" of customers during a period of rationalisation and job losses, so managers at Hotel Co are similarly pragmatic. At the time that the interviews with them were carried out, the British economy was coming to the end of a recessionary period which had seen pay freezes across a wide range of industries. An Assistant General Manager at Hotel Co told me:

At the moment we're going through a bad time because of the recession and no pay rises, and then it's very difficult to motivate people and talk about quality, because they just think 'Why should I bother? I've been two years without a pay rise so I'm not interested'. Money is still the main motivator.

As Table 4.4 shows, employees at Hotel Co generally attach a high level of importance to the concept of "quality improvement". However, whilst 25% described it as the "single most important issue in the company today", this is slightly lower than the 28% who did so at New Bank, and considerably lower than the 56% and 37% who did so at Auto Components and Office Tech respectively.

When asked how they defined the term “quality improvement”, it is not surprising that a large number of employees at Hotel Co (36%), as at New Bank, referred to customer satisfaction and improving customer service. It is interesting, however, that a still larger proportion (44%) defined it in terms of a “company wide standard” or said that it encompasses “everything that the company does”.

The responses to the question about the level of awareness among the workforce of key QM concepts are also interesting (Table 4.5). “Customer satisfaction” and “quality” score highly, as they do across the other three companies. However, there are two other concepts which employees at Hotel Co rate as far higher than other employees. The first is “total quality management”, which is said to be “built into everything that workers do” by 37% of employees at Hotel Co (as compared with just 20% at Auto Components, 15% at Office Tech and 4.5% at New Bank). More starkly, the proportion of employees who rated “employee empowerment” in either of the top two categories at Hotel Co is 74% (far higher than the 20% at Auto Components, 15% at Office Tech and 11% at New Bank). The reasons for this are discussed in the final section of the chapter.

When asked which factors they considered the success of the company most depended upon, employees at Hotel Co rated “methods of ensuring consistent quality”, “the efforts of individual employees” and “the efforts of managers” equally highly. They followed employees at New Bank in rating both the “ability to compete on price” and “economic factors beyond the company’s control” considerably lower than did employees at the two manufacturing companies (Table 4.6).

In summary, Hotel Co clearly employs a considerable range of communication techniques in order to disseminate the key principles of the QM strategy. A central aspect of the TQM programme is the promotion of a strong corporate culture based on employee “empowerment” and customer satisfaction. Employees generally show a keen awareness of the TQM programme, and equate quality squarely with improvements in customer service. Moreover, many of them also feel that the increase in communication has led to a greater sense of trust between themselves and management.

#### **4.2 Attitudes to Change and Trust in Management**

This chapter has so far examined the ways in which managements attempt to communicate the key principles of QM, and data have been presented on levels of employee awareness and commitment to the ideology of QM at each of the four case study companies. Another set of questions probed further into employee attitudes towards organisational change more generally, as well as feelings of trust and loyalty. A better feel for the degree of commitment to the principles of QM can be gained by considering employees’ general attitudes to the changes that have taken place, in terms of whether they are now more or less supportive of them, and if so for what reasons.

Employees were firstly asked what their attitude had been to the QM strategy when it was first introduced (Table 4.7). The highest level of support for the changes was clearly among employees at Hotel Co and Auto Components, with 62% and 48% respectively saying they had been “strongly in favour”. The most indifferent attitudes are found

among employees at New Bank, where over half said they had been “neither opposed nor in favour”.

Those who said they had been in favour of the changes saw them as generally the “best way forward”, or as necessary for competitive business reasons. Over half of employees at each company mentioned one of these reasons. Of the smaller number who were opposed to the changes, a general feeling of apprehension and uncertainty was cited as the main reason for this.

Roughly half of all employees said their opinion of the QM strategy had changed over the last three years. Not only were employees at Hotel Co and Auto Components the most supportive of the changes when they were introduced, they are also the most likely to have increased their level of support over the past three years. Seventy-one percent of employees at Hotel Co said they are now “a lot more supportive” of the changes, as did 37% at Auto Components. Employees at Office Tech show the biggest drop in support, with over one-fifth saying they are now either “less supportive” or “a lot less supportive”. As regards the reasons for these changes in levels of support, those more in favour tended to say they were now more aware of the reasons for the QM strategy, and had seen the benefits which it had brought to the company.

A large majority of all employees felt that further changes were likely in the near future (Table 4.8), with many saying they thought there would be further general changes in the direction of the particular QM strategy. A number at Auto Components referred specifically to the COI programme, many employees at New Bank to “the vision”, and a



large number at Hotel Co to the TQM programme. The largest proportion at Auto Components (35%) said they thought more new technology would be introduced. Over one-quarter of those at Office Tech said they thought the company would be introducing new and better products, whilst another quarter said they believed there would be changes in management and supervisory structures.

When asked if they supported these further changes, a majority in each company said “yes”, with the highest proportions to do so being at Auto Components (83%) and Hotel Co (64.5%). As for the reasons for this support, many employees again pointed to business and competitive reasons. The only company where the largest proportion did not cite this reason was Office Tech, where the largest proportion (26%) said they supported the changes because they would give employees a chance to learn more varied skills.

The company with the highest proportion of employees who had previously said they did not support the further changes was New Bank (17% having said “no”). Subsequently, over one-quarter of employees at New Bank (28%) said they did not support the changes because they thought that the quality of service to customers would in fact decrease as a result.

Employees were then asked what they considered the overall level of trust to be between management and workers at the company (Table 4.9). Again the most positive responses came from those at Hotel Co (where 72% said there was either “complete trust” or “trust most of the time”) and Auto Components (where the corresponding figure was 60%). The

proportions saying this at the other two companies were significantly lower (34% at New Bank and only 18% at Office Tech).

The largest proportion of employees to say that trust had increased over the last five years was at Hotel Co (36%), whilst the lowest proportion saying this was at Office Tech (11%). Responses from employees at New Bank were mixed, with 31% saying trust had increased, but another 27% saying it had decreased. Most employees said trust had increased because there was now more communication between managers and employees, and because managers had generally adopted a more “open” style. However, not insubstantial numbers (36% at New Bank) felt that trust had decreased because management appeared to be *less* interested in employees and in honouring commitments to them.

Finally in this section, employees were asked how much loyalty they felt towards the company, and the answers illustrate starkly some of the trends emerging from previous questions. Over two-thirds (70%) of employees at Auto Components said they felt a “great deal” of loyalty towards the company, as did almost half (48%) of employees at Hotel Co. In marked contrast, whilst only 4% at Auto Components and Hotel Co categorised their degree of loyalty as either “a little”, “hardly any” or “none at all”, the proportions doing so at New Bank and Office Tech were as high as 40% and 35% respectively.

### 4.3 Discussion

This chapter has examined the methods which management use to communicate the central elements of the QM strategy to employees, and evidence has been presented on the relative levels of employee commitment to the ideology of QM across the four case study organisations. We have seen that, in general, employees show a high degree of awareness of the principles of “quality improvement” and “customer satisfaction” which in differing ways form the basis of the four different QM strategies. We have further seen that employees tend to support these initiatives largely because they recognise the very real business or competitive advantages which can flow from them.

It would, however, be wrong to identify high levels of commitment to what I have called the “ideology of QM” and conclude that there have therefore been deep-rooted changes in employees’ internal values. We have seen that employee co-operation with the espoused values of management often exists alongside continued scepticism and uncertainty. If employees do show commitment to the ideas outlined in this chapter, this is less an indication of the full-scale adoption of a radically new set of values and beliefs, and more a sign of their appreciation of the more rational economic reasons behind practical quality initiatives.

Having said this, employee commitment to QM is by no means wholly determined by economic and competitive circumstances. What the chapter has also clearly shown is that there is scope and space for management strategy to have an important influence on the extent of buy-in to quality ideas. Given similar economic conditions, managements in

different organisations can be more or less successful in this regard, and the way that the message of quality is communicated and received is clearly one key aspect.

Most employees across the four companies have perceived an increase in the extent of management communication since the introduction of the QM strategy, but differences in levels of commitment to management objectives are evident. Perhaps the most successful case is Auto Components. The company has used a wide range of communication methods, many of which employees find very useful. The vast majority of employees also consider this communication to have increased trust between themselves and managers to a large degree. Employees at Auto Components show consistently high levels of awareness of the “COI programme”, and equate continuous quality improvement squarely with customer satisfaction and competitive advantage.

In contrast, there is a significantly lower level of awareness of the principles of the QM strategy among employees at Office Tech. Far fewer of them feel that the increase in communication has increased trust between themselves and management, with a number saying it has made no difference at all. At Office Tech there has been markedly less investment in formal communication methods like notice boards and newsletters, and more reliance on the management chain.

However, although Office Tech may communicate less than Auto Components, the company’s relative lack of success in generating employee commitment to the ideology of QM is due to more than merely the extent of communication. Of greater importance may be the fact that management at Office Tech appear to be giving out mixed messages.

Employees may lack commitment to QM because management themselves do not have a coherent approach and have differing views among themselves on the nature of the ideology which they are trying to disseminate. The Personnel Director himself admits to the company failing in this respect, particularly with new recruits, and other managers are sceptical about the real extent to which the idea of “continuous improvement” has been taken on board.

Although some of the tensions between managers at Office Tech have been highlighted in this chapter, it would be misleading to present these as a simple polarisation between, on the one hand, Japanese managers sticking rigidly to the policies of the parent company and, on the other hand, British managers fighting to introduce greater flexibility. Regardless of nationality, the interviews exposed clear differences of opinion among managers about the nature of the ideology of QM within the company, and about the extent of an identifiable corporate culture. If management lack a consistent message, it should come as no surprise to find confusion and indifference among employees. At Auto Components, by contrast, managers themselves appear to have a more clearly defined quality message, which they communicate with greater consistency and uniformity.

Managers at Office Tech also talk of the “culture clash” within the company, which is clearly still being worked through. Although it is easy to overstate the importance of this, it may be that, due to the influence of the Japanese parent company, the QM strategy at Office Tech initially entailed a far grander cultural project than that at Auto Components. As such, managers have found it more difficult to engender widespread commitment to it among the workforce, and conflicts have been inevitable. It could be said, in fact, that

whilst Office Tech appears in this way to be burdened by its history, managers at Auto Components are in some ways liberated by theirs. The employees at Auto Components tend to have been at the company longer than those at Office Tech. Many of them know how close the company came to closing during the recession of the early 1980s, and they have a respect for management for having “saved” them from this fate. This may also help to explain the far greater levels of loyalty towards the company among Auto Components employees.

The ideological aspects of QM at Office Tech seem, then, to have been characterised by a certain rigidity in approach, with a defined quality culture almost being forced upon the company. As I have already said, if this is resisted by management it is not likely to be adopted with any great degree of conviction by employees. It is worth noting that, to this extent, Office Tech reflects the general image of Japanese transplants as described in much of the “Japanisation” literature; namely, that they are often characterised by a degree of inflexibility in practice, and - as we shall see further in Chapters Five and Six - that the scope for employee involvement is often tightly constrained (cf. Broad, 1994; Elger and Smith, 1994; Wood, 1993).

In a similar fashion, although for different sorts of reasons, New Bank appears to follow Office Tech in trying to force a new culture upon less than fully committed employees. Senior management at the bank are determined to push ahead with fundamental restructuring, but many employees perceive the pace of change to have been too quick, and the widespread job losses that have occurred across the whole industry heighten their sense of insecurity. Above all, employees feel that in the process of introducing the QM

strategy insufficient attention has been given to their concerns, and that their often deeply-held loyalties towards the bank have been abused. Indeed, the data show that, across the four companies, feelings of loyalty are by far the lowest among New Bank employees. Moreover, many of them feel that, despite being committed to providing a quality customer service, the continuation of inadequate staffing levels will render delivery of the bank's "vision" impossible.

The QM strategy at New Bank has involved a considerable increase in the extent of communication with employees. Again, however, simply having lots of communication does not necessarily mean that the message is getting across and being adopted enthusiastically. The data show that employees at New Bank are more aware of increasing levels of communication than are employees at the other three companies, but at the same time they are also by far the most sceptical about what is being communicated. New Bank employees show distinctly mixed reactions when asked how useful the various communication methods are. A large number consider video communications, which are a key part of the QM strategy, as of little use at all. Moreover, a majority do not think that increasing communication has led to any greater degree of trust between themselves and management.

Employees at Hotel Co are also aware of there having been a large increase in the level of communication since the QM strategy was introduced. Unlike employees at New Bank, however, a large majority of them believe that this has had a positive effect in terms of increasing trust between themselves and management.

As regards conceptions of quality improvement, a large number of employees at both Hotel Co and New Bank tend to define it largely in terms of customer satisfaction and improving customer service. However, the largest proportion of employees at Hotel Co define it in terms of a company-wide standard or in terms of encompassing “everything that the company does”. The TQM programme at Hotel Co has been designed to be a company-wide standard, and to encourage employees to think that quality is a part of every aspect of the hotel and does not just relate to direct dealings with customers. Clearly, then, this part of the TQM message has been internalised by a majority of employees.

The data demonstrate the relatively high levels of awareness of the QM strategy among Hotel Co employees in other ways too. In terms of key concepts in the QM discourse, a large number at Hotel Co rank the concept of “TQM” highly. This is perhaps not surprising since this is the name of their particular QM strategy, and equally large numbers at Auto Components referred at various stages to “COI”, as did many at New Bank to “the vision”. However, a far larger number of employees at Hotel Co also rate the concept of “employee empowerment” highly, despite it being a principle which all four companies see as central to their QM strategies. Employees at New Bank do not rank any of the concepts particularly highly in terms of their general level of awareness among the workforce.

Although customer service is stressed at Hotel Co and New Bank, perhaps unsurprisingly it is product quality which figures highest in the minds of employees at the two manufacturing firms. A more revealing sectoral difference is that whilst employees across



all four companies rate quality and customer satisfaction as important to company success, those at Auto Components and Office Tech are far more likely to say that the ability to compete on price is of equal if not greater importance. Having said this, there are also differences here *between* the two manufacturing companies, with employees at Auto Components rating the ability to compete on price as more significant than their counterparts at Office Tech. This may be because competition for valve seat guides is more intense than that for photo-copying machines, and Auto Components consequently operate in a more price-sensitive market.

Employees at Auto Components and Hotel Co show consistently the highest levels of support for the changes which have taken place. They both showed the highest levels of support for the QM strategy when it was first introduced, with many saying that they understood the business logic of the changes. In contrast, a large number of employees at New Bank were indifferent to them. Auto Components and Hotel Co employees have also increased their levels of support for the QM strategy far more than those at the other two companies, with employees at Office Tech showing the biggest drop in support. Employees across all four companies thought there would be further developments in the QM strategy. Again reflecting higher levels of trust in management, a very large number at Auto Components and a substantial number at Hotel Co said they were supportive of these changes. Notably, a significant number at New Bank did not support the changes because they thought they would actually have the opposite effect to that intended, namely of *reducing* the quality of customer service.

When employees were asked directly about the level of trust they thought existed at the company, again by far the most positive responses came from those at Auto Components and Hotel Co. Mixed views were expressed by employees at New Bank, with some feeling that management are now more open and therefore more deserving of trust, and an almost equal number saying the exact opposite. Following all this, it is perhaps not surprising to find employees at Auto Components expressing the greatest degree of loyalty towards the company, followed closely by those at Hotel Co. Expressions of loyalty were markedly lower among employees at the other two companies, especially those at New Bank.

We have seen in this chapter how differences in the nature of the ideology of QM, and in the ways that it is communicated by management, can affect the degree of employee commitment to the overall QM strategy. Managers at Auto Components communicate a strong and simple message in a firm and coherent way, namely that product quality leads to customer satisfaction which in turn leads to enhanced job security. In so far as management communicate limited realistic objectives, employees are keenly aware of the practical business reasons why quality is important. Relatively speaking, the ideology of QM at both Office Tech and New Bank is rather more idealistic and perhaps fails as a result to generate the same degree of commitment. We have also seen how historical and cultural factors, conflicting views among managers, as well as simply too much change, can in different ways undermine attempts to generate employee commitment to QM. At the very least, the analysis confirms the need to address a range of factors within specific organisational contexts, and highlights the inadequacies of the view that a given set of

communication techniques can simply be implemented by managers and have the desired effect of increasing commitment to corporate objectives among employees.

Although the ways in which management communicate the ideology of QM may be an important factor in explaining variations in levels of employee commitment, it remains only one factor. A fuller understanding of these variations will become clearer in subsequent chapters as other significant issues are examined. The next chapter begins this further analysis by looking in detail at the nature and extent of employee participation in teamworking at each company.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT - TEAMWORKING

The previous chapter examined in detail the ways in which management communicate the ideological aspects of quality to employees, which may be seen as an essentially “top-down” exercise. This chapter begins the analysis of employee involvement in QM - or “bottom-up” initiatives - by analysing the methods which management use to encourage employee participation through teamworking.

The analysis is split into two sections. The first looks at participation in *task-based* teamworking, i.e. the nature of the organisation of work into teams within each company. This form of teamworking is described in Chapter One as an element of “hard QM”, since it stems from the nature of the organisation of production; teams arise because jobs are designed and organised on the basis of functional flexibility, and management may encourage their development by organising tasks and work routines in certain ways.

Much importance is assigned to this form of teamworking in the QM literature (cf. Coyle-Shapiro, 1995; Dale and Cooper, 1992; Waldman, 1994), and it is generally considered to be a key factor in securing employee flexibility and generating organisational commitment (cf. Legge, 1995). So, what precise forms does this teamworking take? Are there particular sectoral differences which are likely to emerge in the nature of teams? And what degree of involvement do employees feel that they have through working in teams? These are some of the central questions addressed in this chapter.

More specifically, an examination is made of the actual levels of responsibility and autonomy that task-based teams have, and employees' own perceptions of what it means to be "in a team" are considered in detail. To the extent that these perceptions are at odds with formal definitions of teamworking, one of the important issues raised by the analysis concerns the question of what actually constitutes "teamworking". Certainly it should not be seen as one single phenomenon or concept, and the importance of "informal" definitions should not be underrated.

The second section of the chapter considers participation in policy development groups. These are *problem-solving* teams as opposed to task-based teams. They are considered to be an element of "soft QM", in the sense that they are set up by management for the explicit purpose of involving employees in decision-making, in an attempt to make greater use of their latent potential and encourage their commitment to managerial objectives. Problem-solving teams thus do not stem naturally from the organisation of production. Indeed, they have no necessary relationship with the nature of work tasks at all, but are instead voluntary groups initiated by management, and function as a key element of the HRM dimension of QM strategies.

The main form that problem-solving teams take is quality circles, and these too are considered central to the achievement of employee commitment within QM organisations (cf. Dale and Boaden, 1994; Gallie and White, 1993). This chapter examines the dynamics of the operation of such groups. What are the pressures and constraints that lead to the adoption of quality circles? Once introduced, what conditions allow them to be sustained? If problem-solving teams survive, are they still the independent and "bottom-

up” initiatives as originally conceived, or have they become subject to greater managerial influence, and if so in what ways? In exploring these issues, the central focus is again on employee perceptions.

Within each of these two sections, the analysis follows the same pattern as the previous chapter, with each of the four companies considered in turn. Following this, a final section draws together the key findings, and offers a comparative assessment of the nature and extent of employee participation through teamworking.

## **5.1 Task-based Teamworking**

### **5.1.1 Auto Components**

Task-based teamworking at Auto Components exists primarily on the production lines in the new shop. Cellular manufacturing techniques have been introduced, and within each cell there is full functional flexibility between tasks. As the Union Convenor explained:

In there now, a man can draw from the powder stores a bin of powder and he can take that all the way round. He can set it on top of the press, set the press, get the pieces off, control the robot that goes back, put it through the furnace, put it through the heat treating [and] side-face grind it.

Under the previous system of linear production it was difficult to move employees between roles. With each employee trained in a variety of different jobs, this is now far easier. In the words of the Production Manager:

It doesn't matter if Harry is out because Fred can do it .... If a machine breaks down you can move that man and put him somewhere else. If there's absenteeism you can move them round. It's a beautiful cell to manage.

When the company selected the initial eight employees to work in the first cell, they all had one specific skill, whether it was as a grinder or a setter or a machine operator. One of the priorities of management at this early stage was to send all of those who were to work in the new cells on team-building courses. As the Training and Safety Officer recalls, however, getting to the current stage of fully operational cells was far from a smooth process:

The machinery was arriving, hitting the deck and being bolted into place, and the guys were expected to run it and do a whole series of tasks that were quite complex. The engineering back-up was sometimes a problem. It was a very, very difficult initial period .... It isn't a five minute job, it's a series of extremely busy development periods.

As regards employee perceptions and attitudes towards task-based teamworking at Auto Components, employees in both the new factory and the old were firstly asked whether they considered themselves to usually work on their own or in a team. As Table 5.1 shows, whilst every employee in the old factory described themselves as working on their own, the vast majority of those in the new factory (92%) recognised their new working arrangements as based on teamworking.

Of those in the new shop who said they worked in a team, most (64%) said they had had a choice over whether to do so or not, and only 12.5% said they worked in a team because they were compelled to do so by management (Table 5.2). Of the reasons given for choosing to move to the new factory and work in teams, most employees said they considered it to be in some sense moving with the times, and also as giving themselves the chance to face new challenges and acquire new skills. Although employees in the new

shop do sometimes move between different teams, the majority of their time is spent in one particular team.

As for how often members of each team help each other out with problems, a very large proportion of employees in the new shop (84%) said that this would “always” happen. When asked about how strong a sense of teamwork they felt existed in their particular team, the same proportion (84%) described it as “fairly strong” or “very strong” (Table 5.3). As for whether this sense of teamwork had increased recently, many felt that it had, although a significant minority (28%) regarded it as having decreased. Whilst a majority (68%) felt that the responsibility of their team for organising work had increased, only just over half of employees in the new shop (52%) described their team as having responsibility for the allocation of work tasks between each team member.

As to whether the nature of teamworking in the new shop had changed recently, a small majority (56%) felt that it had, and said that the main changes had been an increase in the number of teams and in the number of employees in each team (Table 5.4). A small proportion (14%) reported enthusiasm for teamworking to have decreased.

Although not officially working in designated teams, questions were also asked of those in the old factory about the extent of co-operation between employees on their production lines. The vast majority (84%) felt that there was a definite sense of teamwork in the old factory (Table 5.5), and most (54.5%) felt that this had increased over the last three years (Table 5.3). If there are problems with a particular job, employees in the old shop said their fellow workers on the line would usually help them out, although a smaller



proportion than in the new shop (68% as compared with 84%) said that this would “always” be the case (Table 5.3). Interestingly, despite the generally positive view of teamworking from those in the new shop, when employees in the old shop were asked if they would prefer to be working in designated multi-skilled teams, over three-quarters said they would not (Table 5.5).

Employees in both the new and the old shop were then asked about the amount of influence they felt that themselves, their supervisors and - in the case of the new shop - their work group had over a variety of issues (Table 5.6). In general, it is striking how many of those in the new shop considered themselves as individuals to have substantially more influence than their work group as a whole. Over two-thirds said they themselves had a “great deal” of influence over the pace at which they work, when they can have a break, and deciding exactly how to do the task at hand. In each of these areas, fewer than 10% of employees ascribed a similarly high level of influence to their work group. Supervisors were said to have the greatest influence over the setting of output targets, as well as when employees can start and finish their work. Where the work group was deemed to have the most influence is over the allocation of work between team members (60% saying it has a “fair amount” or a “great deal” of influence), although even on this issue 84% ascribed a similar level of influence to their supervisor.

As for those in the old shop, a similarly large number described themselves as having the most influence over the pace at which they work and deciding how they are to do the task. Interestingly, those in the old shop felt they have far less influence over when they can have a break than those in the new shop. As with those in the new shop, supervisors

were said to have the most say over the setting of output targets and over deciding what tasks employees are to do (two-thirds describing supervisors as having a “great deal” of influence over these two issues).

Employees in the new shop were then asked if working in teams had required them to develop new skills. All of them said that it had (Table 5.7). A majority of employees in the old shop (60%) also said they had been required to develop more skills over the same period. As for the nature of these skills, most referred to increasing their technical job skills, whilst a number in the new factory also referred to having acquired communication and “team” skills. A large majority of employees in the new shop (84%) said that working in a team had also given them new responsibilities, whilst a smaller majority in the old shop (56%) similarly reported having assumed new responsibilities during the same period. Most employees described these responsibilities as relating to the quality of the product, and especially to checking the quality of one’s own work before passing it off to the next section.

Finally, employees in the new shop were asked about the effect they felt teamworking had had upon a variety of issues (Table 5.8), and about what they would miss if teamworking were abandoned (Table 5.9). On the first question, it is the two issues mentioned above - skills and responsibilities - which were said to have been influenced the most, with 92% saying that these had been “increased” or “greatly increased” as a result of working in teams. The answers to this question highlight again the generally positive attitude towards teamworking among those in the new shop, with the only slightly “low” answers applying to the two “negative” factors in the question (effort and

stress). Furthermore, the majority (60%) said they would be “very sorry” if management abandoned the teamworking approach, with many saying they would miss the sense of team spirit.

It is clear that a central element of the QM strategy at Auto Components has been the establishment in the new factory of cellular manufacturing, with teams of multi-skilled employees trained in the full production process and able to inter-change jobs with each other. Management see the functional flexibility inherent in this system as leading to greater commitment on the part of employees, greater efficiency in production, and ultimately higher quality in terms of the finished product.

It is evident from the data presented above that, in general, employees in the new shop are strongly committed to the principle of task-based teamworking. Most said that it was their own choice to work in teams, and that they did so because they saw it as a progressive move in tune with the strategic direction of the company. A supportive atmosphere was said to exist within the teams, and many positive comments about teamworking were made, such as:

Just doing one job is totally boring. Having a variety of jobs is a lot more interesting.

Being stuck on one machine all the time was heart breaking. Being on different machines is much better.

I’ve become more involved through teamworking, and management do ask you. In every job I had before you were just told what to do.

Interestingly, a strong sense of teamwork was also said to exist among those in the old factory, who still work on linear production lines and who have not gone through the

same training and multi-skilling process as those in the new shop. It is worth also reporting some of the comments which were made by this group of employees. Many of them indicated that they actually prefer working “on their own”, and some cynicism was expressed about the notion that those in the new shop necessarily operate with any greater flexibility or any greater sense of teamworking:

Personally I prefer the way I work at the moment. As an individual you're responsible for your own work, but in a team if some are not pulling their weight it won't work.

The way we work is unofficial teamworking anyway. So when it's an imposed team I'm not sure how that would work. So I prefer the way we are now.

They say if you've gone on a course you're in a team and if you haven't you are not, but that is a load of crap, it really is .... The company will class someone as multi-skilled. But we have multi-skilling in our shop as well, with people who can do a lot of different jobs. This isn't really a problem, but we just laugh at it because the others are called “multi-skilled”.

### 5.1.2 Office Tech

In its main production areas, Office Tech currently operates with linear production lines, and these do not easily lend themselves to the organisation of work around cell-based teamworking. In the words of the Personnel Director:

The way we go about our business in operating terms, I don't think it naturally encourages teamworking .... The way we put photo-copiers together is very individual. Although the next person on the line may be your “customer” and relies on you attaching your bit correctly so that he can do his bit correctly .... it's one person with a turn-around time of so many seconds doing a routine job.

The company would like to flatten the organisational hierarchy further and move towards teamworking based around cells of multi-skilled employees:

I would like to move towards [cellular manufacturing], right across the whole company, so that .... we could just move them in and we'd know that they are ready trained and flexible and capable. (Personnel Director)

Despite the slow progress towards this end, managers nevertheless have the impression that there is a strong sense of teamwork among operatives already, which to some extent makes them less willing to consider adopting "real" teamworking. To quote the Personnel Director again:

I would have thought that, especially in the very repetitive jobs, people would have been keen to move around. But you find you are disrupting them from having their mates either side of them, and you find that a lot of them would rather put up with the same job than be in groups .... They have their breaks together, you see them together. They may be strung out [on the production line] but they tend to see themselves as a defined unit.

Also identified as problematic by management in terms of change is the current role of supervisory staff:

The other thing I would like to work towards is the genuine teamwork concept where the supervisor is very much a "godfather"/team leader/coach etc. Our supervisors are to some extent a little immature. That's one of the problems of this organisation, that we recruited such a young workforce. (Personnel Director)

When asked initially if they considered themselves to be working in a team, the majority of shop-floor employees at Office Tech (70%) said that they did, although this figure is somewhat lower than the corresponding figure of 92% from the new factory at Auto Components (Table 5.1). In the absence of any formally prescribed work groups, most of these employees defined their "team" as simply their own unit or section members working together to get the job done. Interestingly, a large majority of those saying they worked in a team (75%) also said they had no choice about the matter, which contrasts sharply with the 64% from the new factory at Auto Components who said they *did* have a

choice (Table 5.2). As with the comparable sample at Auto Components, a large majority at Office Tech (69%) said they usually worked within the same team.

Most employees at Office Tech reported that team members would help each other out if there were problems, although only half as many as at Auto Components (42% compared with 84%) said that this would “always” happen (Table 5.3). As for how strong the sense of teamwork is felt to be by employees at Office Tech, 58% described it as “fairly strong” or “very strong”, which is again lower than the corresponding figure of 84% at Auto Components. Interestingly, however, a much higher proportion at Office Tech - 71% as compared with 40% at Auto Components - felt that this sense of teamwork had increased recently. Around half of employees at Office Tech (51.5%) consider the responsibility of their “team” for organising work to have increased. This is somewhat lower than the corresponding figure of 68% among those in the new shop at Auto Components. Table 5.3 also highlights more starkly the relatively greater autonomy of task-based teams at Auto Components. Whilst over half of employees there (52%) said that work is assigned to the team for allocation between individual employees, only 15% said that this was the case at Office Tech.

When asked about the relative levels of influence of themselves, their supervisors and their work group, far fewer employees at Office Tech ascribed a high level of influence to themselves. Rather, a lot more influence was said to reside with supervisors (Table 5.6). For instance, on the three issues over which a majority of employees at Auto Components said they had a “great deal” of influence themselves - namely the pace at which they work (60%), when they can have a break (60%), and deciding how to do tasks (64%) - the

numbers at Office Tech who said they had a similar level of influence themselves were consistently lower (47%, 23% and 42% respectively).

Supervisors were ascribed more influence over these issues by employees at Office Tech than they were by those at Auto Components, as they were consistently over other issues too. For instance, supervisors were said to have a “great deal” of influence over the allocation of work between team members by 56% at Office Tech (compared with 32% at Auto Components); over rotation between jobs by 45.5% (40%); over deciding what tasks employees do by 53% (48%); and over when employees can start and finish their work by 44% (40%).

As at Auto Components, work groups were said to have far less influence than employees themselves or supervisors over all issues. 85% at Office Tech described the work group as having either “not much” influence or “none at all” over the setting of output targets, when employees can start and finish work, as well as when they can have a break. They were ascribed the same level of influence over when to rotate between jobs by 81.5%, and over the allocation of work between team members by 78%.

Finally, far fewer employees at Office Tech said that working in teams had required them to develop new skills (68% as compared with 100% at Auto Components), or to take on board new responsibilities (34% as compared with 84%). Those who did say they had developed new skills and responsibilities referred less to technical skills and product quality responsibilities, and more to communication and supervisory issues (Table 5.7).

In summary, the nature of the organisation of production at Office Tech is clearly not conducive to the kind of integrated task-based teamworking which operates in the new factory at Auto Components. In this sense, the case of Office Tech highlights the technical limits to teamworking, not only in terms of the physical structure of production, but also as a consequence of the relatively lower skill levels among its employees. Some managers say they would like to progressively move away from linear production lines and gradually introduce greater multi-skilling, with more highly trained employees who would be capable of rotating between jobs. However, problems remain with the nature of the supervisory structure, and the desire to introduce more task-based teamworking was expressed with varying degrees of enthusiasm by key managers, highlighting again the lack of a fully coherent management strategy.

The data showed, however, that despite the lack of formally prescribed task-based groups, most employees at Office Tech do consider themselves to be working in a team, which they tend to define in terms of their own unit or section members. Although most said they felt compelled to work this way by management, a strong sense of teamwork was reported by more than half, and fellow employees were said to help out frequently with problems. In general, however, responses here were less positive than among employees in the new shop at Auto Components, and there was also far less of a sense that working in teams had led to the adoption of any new skills or responsibilities.



### 5.1.3 New Bank

At New Bank, it is difficult to identify discernible task-based teams. There appear to be parallel trends occurring. One is towards the promotion of the idea of the branch as a “team”. As a regional Quality Service Co-ordinator explained:

In terms of the service improvement programme that the bank is now driving through .... [there will be] further teamwork activity, but far more focused around business objectives, where people will actually have improvement objectives to go for, tailored to their own branch needs.

On the other hand, there is an increasing degree of demarcation between the different sections *within* branches, which tends to increase interaction between employees within sections at the expense of branch-wide co-operation:

The introduction of sectionalisation has .... helped team spirit within the individual sections, but if I need a cashier to support the cashiers team at 3.30PM because we’re busy, we have to call relief from another team, and that’s where the team spirit has gone at the moment. (Branch Manager)

As for the newly established regional Business Centres, many of the managers here believe they have had the opportunity to create a working environment conducive to a more genuine sense of teamworking. In the words of a manager from a regional Lending Centre:

We were fortunate in being the first Lending Centre set up in [the region], and we were effectively given a blank sheet of paper and told to go away and do it .... First of all, staff were allowed to express their preferences as to where they wanted to work, which has never been done before to my knowledge .... Beyond that .... teams were given a very loose structure to operate to, again something which none of us were familiar with .... We tried to engender a team spirit, and this works very well.

This variety in the nature of task-based teamworking at New Bank is reflected in the perceptions of employees themselves. Two-thirds said that they usually worked in a team, but defined this in a variety of different ways (Table 5.1). Interestingly, whilst 64% at Auto Components and 25% at Office Tech felt that they had a choice about whether to work in a team or not, at New Bank only 7% of employees said that they had a choice (Table 5.2). A large majority of those working in teams (79%) said that they usually worked in the same team.

At New Bank, 69% of employees said that the other members of their team would “always” help if there were problems with a job. As at the two manufacturing firms, the largest category of employees (in this case 50%) described the sense of teamwork in their group as “fairly strong”, with fewer (29%) opting to describe it as “very strong”. Roughly half of employees at New Bank (49%) said that this sense of teamwork had increased during the past three years (Table 5.3). Concerning the degree of responsibility which teams have for organising work, New Bank has the largest proportion of employees from across the four companies reporting that this responsibility has increased (69%). At the same time, however, a far smaller proportion (26%) described the team as having responsibility for the allocation of work between individual employees.

As regards perceptions of the relative levels of influence of themselves, their supervisors and their work group, employees at New Bank followed those at Auto Components in ascribing a large degree of influence to themselves (Table 5.6). A large majority of employees at Auto Components described themselves as having a “great deal” of influence over the pace at which they work (60%), when they can have a break (60%),

and deciding how they are to carry out tasks (64%); at New Bank the corresponding figures are even higher, being 73%, 65% and 70.5% respectively.

As at the two manufacturing firms, supervisors are said to have the most influence over the setting of output targets (54.5% at New Bank describing this as a “great deal”), over when employees rotate between jobs (58.5%), and over the allocation of work between team members (40%). As for teams themselves, these are ascribed a somewhat higher degree of influence over most issues than at the two manufacturing firms, although their influence remains low, and it is only over the issue of the allocation of work between team members where more than half of employees at New Bank said that their team had either a “fair amount” or a “great deal” of influence.

As for the acquiring of new skills and responsibilities through teamworking, significant numbers of employees at New Bank reported that this had happened, although as at the two manufacturing firms there is a greater emphasis on new skills than on new responsibilities (Table 5.7). At New Bank, the skills acquired through teamworking are generally said to be those of communication and “people” skills, which mirrors the heavy emphasis on man-management and leadership as those areas in which responsibilities have increased.

As at Auto Components, employees at New Bank were finally asked in this section about the effect they felt working in teams had had upon a variety of issues (Table 5.8), and about how they would feel if the bank abandoned its general quality improvement programme (Table 5.9). On the first issue, significantly fewer employees at New Bank

merit the specific issue of teamworking with having had a particularly positive effect on most issues. For instance, whilst a large majority at Auto Components said teamworking had “increased” or “greatly increased” the variety of tasks in their job (88%), their level of responsibility (92%) and their level of job satisfaction (76%), on these same issues a considerable number at New Bank said that teamworking had either had “no effect” or had led to a decrease (the figures are 54%, 39% and 41% respectively). Employees at New Bank also appear less committed to the bank’s overall “vision” than those in the new shop at Auto Components do to the principles of teamworking and new working practices. 56% said they either wouldn’t mind if the bank abandoned its “vision” or would positively prefer it if they did. Among the other 44% who said they would be a “bit sorry” or “very sorry” if this happened, a sense of teamworking and team spirit figured very low down on the list of things they said they would miss.

It is, then, not as easy to identify the extent of teamworking at New Bank as it is at the two manufacturing firms. Indeed, managers themselves have different conceptions of the boundaries of task-based groups, some defining them on a branch-wide basis and others referring to a growing sense of teamworking within sections. As regards the definitions of employees, the data reveal that some two-thirds consider themselves as working in a team, which they define in a variety of ways, although only a very small number feel that they had a choice about doing so. Other employees were said to be supportive, and a fairly strong sense of teamwork was reported. Working in teams was also said by many to have led to the adoption of new skills and responsibilities, although, as at Office Tech, the general level of commitment to teamworking among employees at New Bank is notably lower than among those in the new shop at Auto Components.

#### 5.1.4 Hotel Co

Hotel Co operates task-based teamworking within defined work areas. For example, in one of the full-service hotels studied there is now full functional flexibility within two key areas. One is “food and beverages”; where previously there were rigid demarcations between the bar, the restaurant and room service, all of the employees in these areas can now inter-change and work in any area. The other area is “reception”; where previously this was divided between switchboard, night audit and reception, now all employees inter-link with one another. In a similar way to the Production Manager at Auto Components, the Personnel and Training Manager from this hotel extols the virtues of functional flexibility in organisational terms, and also believes it has had a direct effect on the quality of customer service:

There is certainly the flexibility there .... so if there's a staff shortage or a sudden busy period then they can help one another out .... And this was very much to give flexibility from a rota point of view, and to be able to give the customer the kind of service they wanted at the time they wanted it .... The majority [of jobs] have got people contact, and if they've got the people skills then we can transfer them.

Generally speaking it is in the larger hotels that this functional flexibility within departments is to be found. In the smaller hotels there is greater flexibility *between* as well as within specific work areas. As one of the Assistant General Managers from a limited-facility hotel explained:

[A full-service] hotel .... is very departmentalised .... [whereas] here someone might work in a restaurant, then work on the desk, then they might clean rooms, then work on reservations. So people work in other people's areas. The idea .... is flexibility, so that everyone can work in at least two departments .... One of the good things about TQM here is that I've never heard anybody say 'That's not my job'. Everyone seems willing to do anything.

Teams are thus generally defined in terms of each functional area in the hotel. All those working in “food and beverages” are one team, whether they be in the restaurant or kitchens. All those in “front of house” are another team, regardless of which particular job they usually do. As a Front Desk Manager explained:

When I started here three years ago a receptionist could do a receptionist’s job, a telephonist could do a telephonist’s job, a cashier could do a cashier’s job, and someone on night audit could be a night auditor. But they are all multi-functional now, and they don’t have particular roles .... As far as we are concerned in front office, we are one team.

The majority of employees at Hotel Co (69%) did indeed recognise themselves as working in teams (Table 5.1), with two-thirds feeling that they had no choice but to work this way (Table 5.2). As at the other three companies, the largest category of employees - in this case 50%, the same figure as at New Bank - described the sense of teamwork in their group as “fairly strong”. Most (57%) said that it had increased in the last three years, and the majority (60.5%) said that other team members were always willing to help out if there are problems (Table 5.3). As regards the responsibility of teams for organising and allocating work, the responses of employees at Hotel Co are very similar to those at New Bank. That is, whilst a majority (in this case 61%) said that the responsibility of the team for organising work had increased, a far smaller proportion (32.5%) said that the team had responsibility for allocating work between individual employees.

As regards the relative levels of influence of themselves, their supervisors and their work group (Table 5.6), again a majority at Hotel Co ascribed a “great deal” of influence to themselves over three particular issues; namely, the pace at which they work (59.5%), how they do the task at hand (70%), and when they can have a break (58%). Supervisors

are deemed to have the most influence over deciding when employees start and finish their work (81% said they had a “fair amount” or a “great deal” of influence), the allocation of work between team members (78%), and also how tasks are carried out (78.5%).

Once again, the work group was ascribed relatively little influence over these issues. The figures here are similar to those at New Bank, although there are four issues - as opposed to only one - over which at least half of the employees at Hotel Co said their team had either a “fair amount” or a “great deal” of influence; these are work allocation between team members (68%), the pace at which they work (67%), when they can have a break (51%), and deciding what tasks they are to do (50%).

The extent to which employees at Hotel Co said they have been required to develop new skills and responsibilities as a result of working in teams is also similar to the other three companies; that is, a majority said they have done this, but rather more said they have developed new skills (in this case 81%) than new responsibilities (58.5%). As for the nature of these skills and responsibilities, the figures here are very similar to those at New Bank, with an emphasis on communication and “people” skills, and corresponding responsibility for man-management and leadership (Table 5.7).

To sum up, task-based teamworking exists at Hotel Co in so far as employees rotate between jobs within distinct functional areas. In the smaller hotels, there tends also to be functional flexibility *between* these areas. Managers consider this to be a more efficient way of organising work, and believe that it contributes to improvements in the quality of

customer service. The data have shown that, in line with employees at the other three companies, most employees at Hotel Co consider themselves to be working in a team. A fairly strong sense of teamwork is again reported by a majority of employees, and a supportive atmosphere is said to exist when problems arise. Most employees also say that they have adopted new skills and responsibilities as a result of working in teams and, as at New Bank, the emphasis here is placed primarily upon communication and social skills.

## **5.2 Problem-solving Teamworking**

### **5.2.1 Auto Components**

As well as a heavy investment in task-based teamworking in the new factory, we saw in Chapter Three that the QM strategy at Auto Components has more recently involved the establishment of an integrated package of employee communication and involvement measures. Central to the “continuous on-going improvement” programme are regular quality circle meetings, which are referred to as “COI groups”. These are problem-solving as opposed to task-based teams, and are designed to provide an opportunity for shop-floor employees to identify problems and put forward their own solutions to them.

Managers at Auto Components are generally keen to give employees the freedom to put suggestions forward, but at the same time they apply pressure to ensure that the kinds of issues which are raised conform to the specific principles of “continuous on-going improvement”:



Lots of ideas are generated from the manufacturers .... the people who do the day-to-day jobs .... Sometimes ideas are put forward which are .... not really what we want from the COI groups, so we coax them around to the small, low-cost improvements, which is an endless area. (Production Manager)

More generally, senior managers feel that there is a need to maintain close overall control of the COI groups, lest the discretion of employees becomes too wide and begins to encroach upon managerial prerogative. This attitude is well illustrated by the Training and Safety Officer:

One of the things that is still a problem is that you empower people to set up COI groups and teams and everything else, but unless the managers are .... able to influence and control the teams, then very often it's a case of the team taking over the manager and telling the manager what to do .... Generally things tend to resolve themselves, but there are occasions when [the Personnel and Quality Director] will take a lead and boot somebody out or put somebody in, or manipulate the situation.

Rather than being worried that COI group members may start "telling the manager what to do", the Union Convenor is more concerned that, even if they were to do this, managers can all too easily disregard what is being suggested to them. His point is that the ideas generated by COI groups actually need to be taken up by management if the relatively high levels of trust at the company are to be maintained:

It's no good having a COI group and people meet and they make suggestions and they're ignored .... When they meet .... and when they come up with the whole solution, and it's viable, we expect to see it carried out, otherwise what's the point? .... And there are times when to me people deserve an answer .... They [management] are relying a lot on employee co-operation, but we in turn are relying on managerial follow through.

As well as these quality circle teams, Auto Components also have a number of more *ad hoc* problem-solving groups, such as informal meetings of charge hands, or the more regular morning production meetings on the shop-floor. However, management are keen that the issues raised in these meetings are kept separate from those raised in quality

circle-type groups. A key feature of the QM strategy is that the integrity of COI groups is maintained, and that they meet on a regular basis regardless of whether management have identified particular problems that need addressing:

We have two or three [COI groups] .... that have been going for two-and-a-half years with roughly the same people and consistently doing well. Other teams are not so good and fall apart due to difficulties, maybe personality clashes or whatever. But the overall thrust is that the teams continue to work come rain or shine, and they continue to be part of our culture. (Training and Safety Officer)

As regards the reasons why Auto Components support the continuing operation of COI groups, the position of the company in the product supply chain is a key factor. Pressure from customers was identified in Chapter Three as an important reason for the adoption of the general principles of QM. More specifically, it is the trend towards stricter audits on the part of the companies which Auto Components supplies which largely explains the interest not just in hard production techniques, but also increasingly in the softer elements of employee involvement and participation. The Training and Safety Officer illustrates the nature of these pressures well when commenting on the difference between the quality standard BS5750 and a broader QM strategy:

All BS5750 is is a manual system for documenting what you do, and, as long as you follow the manual system, when people audit your procedures you'll have no problem. But the concept of TQM is that you go from the procedural systems side to getting people involvement, which may be to do with pay and appraisal, setting up groups, introducing more flexibility in the way you work, a whole range of issues that make the difference between a 5750 quality standard and a TQM environment .... To be a "preferred supplier" you've got to have certain quality awards, and these generally go far beyond 5750, which is just the start, just a benchmark. If you haven't got that they won't even come and talk to you. But more and more we are influenced by what our customers want, and they are probably doing these things in their own organisations in bigger ways and in more sophisticated ways, and they actually want to see that it follows through to their suppliers.

The views of employees at Auto Components reflect the degree to which COI groups have become a recognised part of the day-to-day running of the company, particularly within the new factory. When asked if problem-solving meetings were ever held, all employees in the new shop said that they were, with a far smaller proportion (56%) giving the same reply in the old shop (Table 5.10). And when asked to describe the nature of these meetings, every employee, in both the new and the old shop, referred directly to COI groups. Interestingly, despite the intention that COI groups be held on a regular and routine basis, only just over half (52%) of employees in the new shop said that this was the case. The other 48% said that COI teams met “only when a problem has been identified that needs addressing”. And in the old shop an even higher proportion (75%) gave the latter response.

Table 5.11 shows that the level of attendance at COI group meetings is generally high, with 80% in the new shop and 75% in the old shop saying that they either “often” or “always” attend. As to why they attend, the bulk of employees are evenly split between those who said that COI groups keep them informed of new developments, and those who said they provide an opportunity to be involved in discussing and solving problems.

Table 5.12 highlights the stark contrast between Auto Components and the other three companies in terms of the degree of pressure which employees feel they are under to attend problem-solving meetings. All employees in the old shop report feeling effectively under no pressure whatsoever. And only small numbers of those in the new shop report feeling any notable pressure from either members of their own team (12% reporting a “fair amount” of pressure), from their supervisor (28% reporting either a “great deal” or a

“fair amount”), or from more senior management (16% saying a “fair amount”). As we will see, these figures are very considerably lower than the corresponding figures across all of the other three companies.

A large majority of employees at Auto Components believe that management do listen to the ideas that are put to them by COI groups, with 68% in the new shop and 91% in the old shop saying that management give these ideas either a “reasonable amount” or a “great deal” of serious consideration (Table 5.13). Perhaps partly as a result of this, employees in both factories are virtually unanimous in saying that COI groups are “a good thing”. Many said that they give employees a chance to be involved in quality improvement and to put forward their opinions and grievances to management.

I have described here the central part played by quality circle-type groups at Auto Components. A key objective of management has been to involve employees more in problem-solving activities, and COI groups are one of the main ways in which this objective is realised. Management have been keen to encourage the continued existence of the groups in an essentially regular and employee-led format, although they do take steps to ensure that the issues addressed are ones which conform to the principles of “continuous on-going improvement”. The data reveal a very high level of awareness of COI groups among the workforce, and in particular among those working in the new shop. Employees feel virtually no pressure to attend the groups, but the overall level of attendance is nevertheless very high. The overwhelming feeling is that the groups are worthwhile in that they allow the views of employees to be put forward to managers, who will then usually consider them in a constructive manner. Many of the comments made

by employees on their questionnaire returns reflect this positive view of COI groups.

Typical among them were:

More problems get solved by getting the views of the people who actually do the job.

[COI groups] bring things to a head. It's the only way of showing management that we're serious about a problem. Otherwise they just gloss over it.

The workforce knows more than management about how to solve problems, and this is a way of letting management know.

### 5.2.2 Office Tech

The experience of Office Tech with problem-solving teams differs markedly from that of Auto Components. An attempt was made during the first few years after the establishment of the company to introduce quality circles as a central feature of the overall QM strategy. However, most of the circles which were set up ceased to operate within six months, and there followed a number of years with no quality circles at all. At the time of the case study access to the company, a new attempt was being made to re-establish circles, and a small number were in operation.

I have already described in Chapter Three how the QM strategy at Office Tech is defined in large part by the use of hard quantifiable techniques for ensuring consistency in product quality. Progress on the softer elements of QM has been slow, and the experience with quality circles is an example of how the harder elements have tended to take precedence. When asked why quality circles had withered away completely a few years previously, the Senior Personnel Officer replied:

More important short-term objectives took precedent. Either a sudden burst of production or a change in work patterns brushed them to one side, which was a little unfortunate.

Other factors were also identified as contributing to the failure of quality circles to become an integrated part of the QM strategy. These included the now familiar problems, as discussed in Chapter One, of middle management recalcitrance and lack of top management support. To quote the Senior Personnel Officer again:

Management procrastinated, saying 'We can always pick it up again', or 'We'll make a better job of it when all of this is out of the way' .... It was a line management initiative, whereas now .... from the top the Managing Director has now said he wants quality circles to work .... [Also] some of the ideas that were put forward the last time weren't taken up, so [the workforce] are probably conditioned now to think that quality circles are a bit of a waste of time.

With the support of senior management, line managers are now beginning to re-establish quality circles in the production areas. Reflecting some of the tensions referred to in Chapter Four, the intention is to learn from the parent company but to avoid following any prescribed Japanese "model":

With quality circles, we have done it before but we played at it. This time we are doing it properly. We've got a proper project group. We have two people out in Japan looking at [the parent company's] quality circles, so that's a £6000 air fare and hotel bill commitment to quality. Without any interference from the Japanese we are deriving our own system. (Production Manager)

In a similar fashion to Auto Components, Office Tech also operates other more *ad hoc* problem-solving groups, including regular daily production meetings on the shop-floor. Despite the failure of formal problem-solving teamworking to become institutionalised, the company do encourage a team approach when problems arise. As at Auto Components, however, managers at Office Tech are keen that these teams address themselves to continuous small-scale improvements:

We have regular production meetings .... with the supervisor getting a group of people together, five minutes in the morning and five minutes at night, and information tends to flow all the time .... If it's things like pay increases then that is a more difficult subject, but if it's rest areas or chairs or lighting or things like that, then we try and address it as best we can. (Production Manager)

Around three-quarters of employees at Office Tech said that problem-solving meetings did take place. However, when asked to describe the nature of these meetings, only 32% referred to quality circles, with virtually all others (59%) mentioning the daily production meetings (Table 5.10). In contrast to Auto Components, a majority of employees at Office Tech (75%) said that problem-solving meetings were held “only when a problem has been identified that needs addressing”.

Although all respondents were asked at this stage of the questionnaire to think only of formal quality circle-type groups when answering the remaining questions, the responses of Office Tech employees to some of the following questions suggests strongly that they had in mind the daily production meetings instead. This is perhaps not surprising given the parlous state of quality circles at the company, as described above. Table 5.10, for instance, shows 57% saying that problem-solving meetings occur “once a day”. Even at their peak, quality circles would never have met more than once every week, and so these employees can safely be assumed to be referring to daily production meetings. Similarly, 71% report that they “always” attend these meetings (Table 5.11), and the largest proportion (42%) say that they do so because it is a company policy over which they have no choice, again clearly suggesting they are thinking of meetings which take place on the production line.

Despite these problems, however, the data are still worthy of comment. Although we can no longer be sure exactly which type of group is being referred to, Table 5.12 shows clearly that employees at Office Tech generally feel a greater pressure to attend problem-solving meetings from supervisors (46.5% saying either a “fair amount” or a “great deal” of pressure), and from more senior management (55%), than they do from either their own work group (19%) or other employees (11.5%). In line with employees at Auto Components, the majority of employees at Office Tech (64%) said they believe management to give either a “reasonable amount” or a “great deal” of serious consideration to the ideas which emanate from problem-solving groups, and the vast majority (82%) described these groups as generally “a good thing” (Table 5.13). Again reflecting the situation at Auto Components, most employees at Office Tech said that the groups allowed them an opportunity to be involved in discussing problems, and to put their own opinions forward.

Having seen problem-solving teamworking come and go at the company, management at Office Tech are now making a renewed attempt to establish quality circles as a central part of the QM strategy. Senior management have given their active commitment to the project, and the objective will be that the groups will address themselves primarily to the identification of areas where small-scale improvements can be made. Given the current low level of quality circle activity in the company, it is not surprising that the data show a far lower level of awareness of these groups among employees at Office Tech than among those at Auto Components. Moreover, those employees who offered further comments about the operation of these groups were also less positive, suggesting for example:



The majority of points that are raised are so trivial that they don't need any further investigation. Or points raised cause arguments because people disagree with what is being said.

Others felt that if problem-solving teamworking was to be re-introduced, the groups would need to continue to convene on a regular basis if employees were to feel that they were being provided with a genuine opportunity to put their views forward:

Because we don't have any [other] chance to put our point of view to supervisors or management, I think it would be a good idea to hold one meeting every month.

With quality circles effectively non-existent at the time of the employee survey, there is a tendency for employees at Office Tech to consider the daily shop-floor production meetings as the primary means of group-based problem-solving activity. Whilst employees at Auto Components report feeling no pressure at all to attend problem-solving meetings, those at Office Tech say they feel a considerable amount of pressure, particularly from supervisors and more senior managers. The picture emerging, then, is of a narrower and more constrained model of QM at Office Tech, something for which more evidence is provided in the following chapter.

### 5.2.3 New Bank

We saw in Chapter Three that the QM strategy at New Bank began with an emphasis on the softer elements, the aim being to instil in employees the importance of customer satisfaction, and to encourage them to put forward ideas about ways of improving the quality of service provision. Within this framework, quality circles were seen as the best means of improving communications and winning the active commitment of employees to quality improvements.

These quality circles were called “quality service action teams” (QSATs). Branches were instructed to set up teams which would meet on a regular weekly basis, follow a structure for identifying problems, and then come up with a solution which would be presented to management for acceptance or rejection. However, after operating with QSATs for some two years, senior management were identifying fundamental problems, which led to a change in the nature of problem-solving teamworking at the bank. The conclusion was drawn that, due to insufficient management direction, QSATs tended to be looking too hard to find problems, managers considered many of the issues they raised to be relatively insignificant, and QSAT members themselves were becoming de-motivated as fewer of their ideas were taken up.

Although these problems are similar to some of the problems which led to the demise of quality circles at Office Tech, management at New Bank were determined that QSATs would not simply disappear. Instead they were re-vamped, but this time with greater management involvement, and with a stronger link to broader management objectives. These newer problem-solving groups are called “quality improvement teams” (QITs). A Branch Manager describes the process of change as follows:

We had “quality service action teams” in branches, and there was a tremendous launch of this quality programme in a big marquee. But unfortunately it died a bit of a death, because branches who went into it quite enthusiastically ran out of ideas, and I’m also not so sure that the customer perceived our quality as being any better .... Now we tend to use QITs more than anything .... QSATs are about saying ‘Can we find any problems?’ .... [whereas] QITs are reactive. So, say I get three complaints on standing orders, and it’s a common complaint, we get a QIT together and say ‘Right, let’s try and knock this on the head’.

The aim now, then, is to only operate problem-solving teams which focus on particular issues, especially those which have implications for the “bottom line”. *Ad hoc* groups will

be formed by managers, and centred on particular business issues. As a regional Quality Service Co-ordinator explained:

We will use the teamwork concept, but teams will be formed to attack particular areas, *ad hoc* teams, not just the same team that meets every Wednesday. We don't want a team to be faffing around for 3 or 4 months without really generating any constructive way forward. So it needs to be focused around business objectives, so they know what they are looking for and come out with the end result they're looking for. Before it was a team looking for a problem rather than a problem being there and a team being formed to solve it, which is really much more focused.

Reflecting management thinking at both of the two manufacturing firms, New Bank is keen that problem-solving teams stick to specific identifiable objectives, and that managers intervene to ensure that this is the case:

The bank has found you will get better value if the teamwork concept is managerially focused and centred on particular business issues. The results are then much better, and management need to stay close to know what is going on. (Quality Service Co-ordinator)

As at Auto Components and Office Tech, formal problem-solving teams are not the only means for "bottom-up" employee involvement at New Bank. Other *ad hoc* meetings are frequently held, particularly on a departmental basis, and the weekly communication meetings also provide an opportunity for suggestions to be put forward.

The vast majority of employees at New Bank (91.5%) said that problem-solving meetings were held. When asked to describe these meetings, the responses were similar to those from employees at Office Tech (Table 5.10). That is to say, only just under one-third (in this case 29%) referred to quality circle-type groups (in this case QSATs), whilst a markedly larger proportion of employees referred to another more regular form of meeting (in this case, 44% referred to weekly communication meetings). However, Table

5.10 also shows the largest proportion of employees at New Bank (40.5%) saying that problem-solving meetings are held “once every few weeks” (with only 24% saying “once a week”). This suggests that the majority were indeed following the instruction on the questionnaire to think only of formal quality circle-type groups when answering these questions.

As at the two manufacturing companies, a large proportion of employees at New Bank (62%) said that they either “always” or “often” attended problem-solving meetings (Table 5.11), and by far the largest proportion (68%) said they did so in order to “know what is going on”.

Although the differences are less marked than among employees at Office Tech, Table 5.12 shows those at New Bank similarly reporting that they feel under far more pressure to attend problem-solving meetings from supervisors (66% reporting either a “fair amount” or a “great deal” of pressure), and from more senior management (73%), than they do from either their own work group (45%) or other employees (45%).

In line with the two manufacturing companies, around two-thirds of employees at New Bank said they believe management to give either a “reasonable amount” or a “great deal” of serious consideration to the ideas put to them by problem-solving teams, and again they are virtually unanimous in describing these teams as generally a “good thing” (Table 5.13). Reflecting closely the responses of employees at Auto Components and Office Tech, the largest proportions said that the groups allowed them an opportunity to

be involved in discussing problems (55%), and a chance to put their own views forward (26%).

As at Office Tech, problem-solving teamworking at New Bank was a central aspect of the initial QM strategy and has since then been subject to something of a re-generation. We have seen, however, that at New Bank the teams did not disappear altogether in the intervening period. Rather, there was a move by senior management to re-focus quality circles so that they would be more managerially-led and consider issues more closely identified with business objectives. The data show a generally high level of awareness of quality circles among New Bank employees, although many equate involvement in problem-solving on a group basis more readily with weekly communication meetings. Pressure to attend problem-solving groups was again said to be greatest from supervisors and more senior managers. Some commented that this pressure can cause problems as other countervailing pressures often take precedence. In the words of one employee:

They [quality circles] are good in theory as there is always room for improvement. In practice our jobs are so busy that we do not have any spare time in the day, and we do not have enough staff to serve and answer phones whilst others are in a meeting.

This theme, of work pressures contradicting the principles behind employee involvement initiatives, is taken up in depth in Chapter Seven. For the moment, suffice it to say that despite these pressures, employees at New Bank generally consider quality circle-type groups to be positive, to the extent that they allow them an opportunity to put views forward and be kept abreast of new developments.

#### 5.2.4 Hotel Co

The trajectory which problem-solving teamworking has followed at Hotel Co is very similar to that at New Bank. The QM strategy began with the same emphasis on the importance of customer service and on encouraging employees to seek ways to improve it. Initially the best means to achieve this was considered to be through a comprehensive quality circle policy. I have already described in Chapter Three how this was indeed the principal defining feature of the TQM programme at Hotel Co for some two to three years.

Since that time, however, the efficacy of free-standing, regular, “bottom-up” problem-solving teams has been increasingly challenged at the company. As a result, although quality circles still operate in many hotels, there is an increasing tendency for groups to be more *ad hoc* and for managers to be more involved in their operation. This transition is summed up by one of the General Managers as follows:

Quality circles were introduced with the idea that they would meet, decide what they wanted to work on, and then solve problems within their own work area. There was nothing dictated by management. It all had to be driven from the bottom, and that did cause some problems. The situation now is that at this hotel there are no groups of people who meet on a regular basis and find problems and try to solve them. The only time there will be people working on something is if I get that going. Quality circles .... [were] difficult because it wasn't driven by management, and so you couldn't give it any direction.

Some managers at Hotel Co are highly critical of the textbook formula for quality circles, which dictates that employees are left free to identify problems themselves and come up with their own suggestions for solutions to them. Their criticisms reflect many of the

points made by managers across the other three case study companies. The views of this Assistant General Manager sum up these feelings in fairly stark terms:

I can't stand quality circles. Basically I've got no patience with them. The whole point of quality circles is that everyone has got a chance and everyone can air their views, but then someone puts forward a totally ridiculous view and you feel like saying 'Don't be so stupid', but you can't do that, you've got to say 'Mmmm, yes, that's interesting', I mean, what a waste of time! And the process takes so long. Some groups take months and months to come up with a solution, and you think 'I could have told you that in the first place'. We [management] usually know what the problem is, and we know what the solution is too, so let's just get on with it .... With quality circles .... you're just going *round* in circles, and getting nowhere.

Again echoing views expressed at the other three companies, most managers at Hotel Co believe that problem-solving teams operate more effectively if they are initiated as and when required by management, rather than meeting on a regular basis regardless of whether a particular problem has been identified. This approach is also seen as more likely to generate the co-operation of employees. As a General Manager explained:

If I'd said 'Look, I need an action team to look at something', they would have said 'Oh, bloody hell, here he goes again, he wants more people to do more work in their own time'. But if I say 'We've got this problem we need to sort out, can a couple of you help me with it over a cup of coffee?', there won't be a problem.

The nature of the organisation of work within the hotels also means that some managers find it difficult to release their staff to attend quality circle meetings on a regular basis. As such, the more *ad hoc* approach to problem-solving teamworking is preferred:

It's more important that I can get customers into the hotel and get them out effectively, and I can't just close the desk. Whereas every other department in the hotel can effectively say 'OK, we're not here for an hour', we can't just say 'Sorry, we're all in a quality circle, check yourselves in and we'll see you later!'. (Front Desk Manager)

Again in line with the other three companies, Hotel Co also has other means available for the “bottom-up” involvement of employees in problem-solving activity, with regular departmental meetings being primary among these.

Every employee at Hotel Co reported that problem-solving meetings did take place. When asked to describe these meetings, the responses were again similar to those from employees at Office Tech and New Bank (Table 5.10). Although a slightly higher proportion at Hotel Co (37%) did refer directly to quality circles, there was still an even larger proportion who thought first of another form of meeting (in this case, 39% referred to departmental meetings). The great majority of employees at Hotel Co (93%) said that problem-solving groups met on a regular basis. When asked how often this was, the responses split reasonably evenly between those saying “once a week” (36%), those saying “once every few weeks” (24%), and those saying “once a month” (29%).

Table 5.11 shows that employees at Hotel Co have the highest rate of attendance at problem-solving meetings across the four companies, with 71% saying that they “always” attend. As for the reasons for this, the bulk said that they attended in order to “know what is going on” and to be involved in discussing and solving problems.

When asked if they felt under pressure to attend these meetings, many employees at Hotel Co said that they felt under no pressure at all. Of those who did report feeling under pressure, the answers are less clear cut than at New Bank or Office Tech, but they do show a similar pattern (Table 5.12). That is, higher proportions report pressure from senior managers (20.5% saying this amounts to a “great deal” of pressure) and from



supervisors (17%) than they do from either their own work group (17%) or other employees (6%).

As for the degree of consideration which employees at Hotel Co believe managers give to the ideas which are generated by problem-solving teams, the responses are almost identical to those at New Bank, with 71% replying either a “reasonable amount” or a “great deal” (Table 5.13). Employees at Hotel Co are also similarly emphatic in describing these groups as generally a “good thing”. Once again, it is the opportunity to be involved in discussing and solving problems that is most highly valued.

To sum up, quality circles have been a permanent and central feature of the QM strategy at Hotel Co. Latterly they have been subject to the same kinds of changes as have occurred at New Bank, whereby they have become more managerially-led and more likely to occur only when management identify particular problems. Managers believe they need to be more involved if the teams are to be effective and if the willing co-operation of employees is to be elicited. The data show a high level of awareness of quality circles among employees at Hotel Co, and a large proportion report that they always attend them. What pressure there is to attend is again perceived as coming mainly from more senior managers. Employees generally see quality circles in a positive light, and believe that management do give genuine consideration to the ideas which they put forward.

### 5.3 Discussion

This chapter has examined the extent to which employee involvement in teamworking is part of the QM strategy at each company. Two different forms of teamworking have been identified, and all four companies have been found to use each one to varying degrees.

The first form of teamworking discussed was task-based teamworking, which refers to the way in which work tasks are organised around teams of employees. This has been defined as an element of “hard QM”, since it stems from the organisation of production. The primary advantage for managers commonly associated with this form of teamworking is that it allows for increased flexibility in the allocation and carrying out of work routines. It is at the same time generally considered to help generate a greater sense of involvement and commitment on the part of employees. Managers at all four companies did indeed identify these as the main benefits.

As a general rule, it is likely to be less easy to identify clearly defined task-based teamworking at service sector organisations. By contrast, at manufacturing companies the nature of the lay-out of the production line will tend to determine work routines to a large degree, and if task-based teamworking exists it is likely to be more clearly structured. This assumption, however, is not entirely borne out at the four case study companies. Taking the manufacturing firms first, task-based teamworking is clearly central to the QM strategy at Auto Components, but it is marginal and under-developed at Office Tech. As for the two service sector cases, whilst it is hard to clearly identify this kind of

teamworking at New Bank, at Hotel Co there is a good deal of functional flexibility between different employees within the same work areas.

It would appear, then, that just as Auto Components and Hotel Co were shown in the previous chapter to be the two companies whose employees show the most awareness of the quality programme and the greatest commitment to it, so they are also the two case study organisations who have introduced the greatest degree of functional or task-based flexibility. Auto Components is in fact the only one of the four case study companies which refers explicitly to task-based teamworking as being part of its QM strategy. As such, it is not surprising that its employees show a greater awareness of it than do those at the other three companies. However, what is striking is that even in those companies where formally prescribed teams do not exist, a large proportion of employees nevertheless describe themselves as working “in a team”, and the vast majority report feeling a “sense of teamwork” within their work area.

A useful way of looking in more depth behind this rather bland conclusion is to consider the data in terms of a series of steps or “hurdles” which must be overcome if a company is to be said to operate with full or “real” task-based teamworking. A lot of employees may say that they work in a team, but what does the data tell us about the actual levels of responsibility and autonomy that these “teams” have? Can they be classified as autonomous or semi-autonomous work groups, or does decision-making authority still reside at a higher level, whilst the term “teamworking” is loosely used to describe any kind of mutual assistance or problem-sharing between employees in the same general work area? Consideration of the findings in this manner will allow for a more nuanced

conclusion as to the true extent of employee involvement in teamworking at each company.

The data have shown over two-thirds of employees at each company describing themselves as working in a team. An obvious starting point in critically assessing the extent of autonomy that these teams have is to consider the nature of the allocation of work between team members. One would expect that if teams had any real degree of discretion they would themselves be responsible for determining the way tasks are distributed between each team member.

However, we have seen that at both Office Tech and New Bank a substantial majority of employees say that work is allocated to each individual within the team by a supervisor or more senior manager. At Hotel Co a slightly higher proportion (around one-third) say that work tasks are assigned to the team for allocation between team members, but it is only in the new factory at Auto Components that over half of the sample say that this is the case. This is hardly evidence of autonomous work groups with discretion to decide who does what within the team, but rather suggests that authority to determine the allocation of tasks resides almost permanently at a higher level.

A second “test” of the extent of team authority is provided by the responses to the question about the relative levels of influence which work teams, supervisors and employees have over a variety of issues. Although the answers appear complex, some clear trends emerge. Most striking is the extent to which employees across all four companies feel that they as individuals have the most influence over certain issues.

Employees consistently say that they themselves have the greatest influence over issues such as the pace of work, how work tasks are carried out, and when breaks can be taken. Only at Office Tech is responsibility for these issues predominantly said to reside elsewhere, namely with supervisors. And supervisors across all four companies tend to be assigned primary responsibility for certain other issues, such as the setting of output targets, the allocation of work between team members, the rotation of team members between jobs, and when work is started and finished. On none of these issues is “the work group” consistently said to have the highest level of influence.

Once again, then, the picture emerging is one of teams in name only. Although large numbers of employees say that they work in a team, the lack of real authority and autonomy in these teams is underlined by the evidence provided by employees themselves, who consistently report that decisions are either made above the level of the team, or else by themselves as individuals without reference to the view of the group as a whole.

Evidence that the teamworking reported is of a weak rather than a strong character is also apparent from the definitions of teamworking which employees themselves provide. As previously stated, Auto Components is the case study company with the most advanced form of task-based teamworking, followed by Hotel Co. and it is indeed in these two companies that the largest proportions of employees describe themselves as working “in a team”. However, over two-thirds of employees at Office Tech and New Bank similarly say that they work “in a team”. The data show the largest proportion from each of these two companies defining this team in very general terms as simply “people working

together to achieve aims". So, it appears that even where functional or task-based flexibility is not a recognised management policy or has not been found to be a central feature of the organisation of work routines, employees will tend nevertheless to apply the term "teamworking" to other more general forms of day-to-day co-operation between themselves and their work colleagues.

Turning now to consider problem-solving teamworking, the rationale behind its introduction again reflects a desire to generate greater commitment to management objectives through involving employees further in the identification and solving of problems. However, rather than being linked to the organisation of production and work tasks, these teams are set up for the explicit purpose of eliciting ideas from employees, and as such they fall under the HRM dimension of "soft QM" (as identified in Chapter One). The most frequently used term for the problem-solving team is the "quality circle", and all four case study companies have used these in one guise or another as a more or less central aspect of their QM strategy.

Although the underlying rationale behind the use of problem-solving teams may be common across the four companies, there are also other more organisationally specific pressures. In the manufacturing sector in particular, the position of a company in the product supply chain can have a direct influence upon the extent to which management feel it is necessary to introduce certain HRM policies, including problem-solving teams. Thus managers at Auto Components spoke of the increasingly broad auditing procedures of the large car companies which they supply, which now demand that suppliers exhibit a wide range of hard and soft QM policies. In contrast, managers at Office Tech will not be

subject to these same pressures, since they occupy a different position in the supply chain as a final producer of photo-copying machines.

The assumption that such pressures will be absent from the private services sector is not wholly accurate, but they will tend to be self-generated rather than purely external pressures. For instance, both New Bank and Hotel Co are attempting to use information gathered from “customer feedback” as a way of deciding which aspects of QM require the closest attention. The implications of these attempts to “measure QM” are discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

In a similar way to task-based teams, employees have also demonstrated a high level of awareness of problem-solving groups where they have been well established. Auto Components is once more perhaps something of an exemplary case here. Quality circle-type groups have been a permanent feature of the QM strategy. Levels of awareness of “COI groups” are very high, especially among those employees working in the new factory. Moreover, the level of attendance at the group meetings is very high. This is despite the fact that employees at Auto Components are unique among the four companies in professing to feel virtually free from any pressure to attend such meetings. Quality circles have also been a central feature of the QM strategy at Hotel Co. A large proportion of employees always attend circle meetings, and the vast majority consider them in a positive light in terms of the opportunity they provide for discussing problems and being kept informed of developments. In fact, Auto Components and Hotel Co appear to stand apart as relatively advanced in terms of both task-based and problem-solving teamworking.

At both Office Tech and New Bank, by contrast, quality circle-type groups are less firmly established, and employees consequently show a lower level of awareness of them. Under one-third of employees at Office Tech and New Bank referred to quality circle-type groups when asked to describe the nature of problem-solving teamworking within their companies. At Office Tech a markedly greater proportion referred to daily production meetings, while the largest proportion at New Bank mentioned weekly communication meetings. Although the vast majority at both Office Tech and New Bank said they considered problem-solving groups to be a “good thing” (very nearly as many as did so at Auto Components and Hotel Co), they also made more negative or critical comments about this form of teamworking on their questionnaire returns.

These differences in levels of employee awareness and enthusiasm for problem-solving teamworking may be largely explicable in terms of the varying degrees of management commitment to it across the four companies. At both Auto Components and Hotel Co management have, in general, remained committed to the continuation of quality circle-type groups since they were first introduced as a key component of soft QM. At Auto Components in particular, managers have been further concerned to maintain the integrity of these groups as essentially “bottom-up” and employee-led. Levels of management commitment in turn appear to be related to some extent to product market position. Auto Components occupy something of a niche market in car components, and the product at Hotel Co may certainly be characterised as “up-market”. In contrast, where the product is more standardised (Office Tech) or delivered on a far larger scale (New Bank), then management may find it more difficult to maintain certain aspects of soft QM on a permanent basis.



In contrast to Auto Components and Hotel Co, the trajectory which problem-solving teamworking has followed at Office Tech and New Bank has been far more uneven. In both cases quality circles were initially seen as a fundamental part of the QM strategy, but they subsequently declined in significance, as management either failed to provide continuing support for them (Office Tech), or else began increasingly to question the rationale behind their operation (New Bank). As a consequence, quality circles did not operate at all at Office Tech for a considerable period and have only recently been re-introduced with greater managerial commitment, whilst at New Bank they have been re-launched (and re-named) to reflect the new management thinking behind them.

This “new thinking” essentially entails the use of quality circle-type groups on a more *ad hoc* basis, so that rather than meeting regularly, they are convened only as and when managers identify particular problems that they deem to require investigation. This has probably developed the furthest at New Bank, where problem-solving teams have been explicitly re-formulated to reflect this objective. It is, however, a discernible trend at the two other case study companies where these groups are well established. At Hotel Co, quality circles have more recently been increasingly managerially-led and thus more likely to occur only when managers believe they are necessary. And even at Auto Components, where managers have tried the hardest to maintain the integrity and independence of “COI groups”, they will nevertheless intervene to affect the substance and inter-personal dynamics of groups if they feel they are straying too far from managerially-defined objectives.

Indeed, one of the key overall findings of this analysis of teamworking is that managers at all four companies wish to increasingly control or limit the extent of genuine employee empowerment. With problem-solving teamworking, the trend is towards greater management intervention to ensure that teams meet only when necessary and that they address themselves to pre-defined “business objectives”. Whilst at first glance this may appear a perfectly sensible approach, it can tend to undermine the principles upon which quality circles are commonly thought to be based. If problem-solving teams are led too much by managers, and if managers are the only ones who define what constitutes a “problem”, then far from feeling “empowered”, the members of the team are more likely to feel they are merely following management dictates. Moves like this reflect a desire to make aspects of soft QM subject to “harder” techniques of measurement and quantification, as well as a desire to relate soft QM activities more closely with financially measurable business objectives.

As regards task-based teamworking, we have seen clearly that what discretion and autonomy teams do have is limited to a fairly narrow range of job-specific tasks, whilst responsibility for key decisions - concerning such issues as the allocation of work and the nature of production or sales targets - is located at a higher supervisory or managerial level. In these circumstances, the conclusion that employees have undergone a process of “empowerment” must again be considered inappropriate.

However, if employees are not empowered, neither are they wholly dis-enchanted. What has also come through strongly in this chapter is the high degree of general employee support for teamworking, in so far as it allows employees to make a contribution towards

solving problems and generates significant co-operation and “team spirit”. Management thus appear to have conceded some genuine autonomy to task-based and problem-solving teams, at the same time as consolidating their own control. As such, there has neither been “empowerment” nor “dis-enchantment”. Rather, what has occurred through teamworking is a general increase in the level of employee *involvement*, but within increasingly defined and measurable limits.

## **CHAPTER SIX:**

### **EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT - INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY**

Aside from involvement through teamworking, the discourse of QM speaks of giving employees wider discretion and autonomy in other more general ways, often based on greater informality and openness within the organisation, and on employees being encouraged to put their own views forward. This chapter examines the extent of employee “empowerment” through such means. Do employees themselves feel empowered? If so, in what ways, and to what extent? Do employees feel that, in general, they now have more influence over quality and problem-solving? And if so, do they tend to favour team-based or individual means? In addressing these questions, it is important to challenge the assumption that increased discretion and autonomy will always necessarily be seen as desirable by employees. To the extent that it exposes them, for example, to more direct and critical customer feedback, then it may not be universally welcomed.

As regards the concept of empowerment, in the prescriptive literature on QM the older quality “gurus” in fact make little direct reference to it, privileging as they do the importance of changing systems and procedures. The term is, however, widely used in the “optimistic” literature (cf. Bowen and Lawler, 1992; Grant *et al.*, 1994; McBride, 1994; Price, 1993), and it also finds resonance within the more populist “excellence” literature (cf. Peters, 1989; Schonberger, 1990). Denham (1996) has highlighted the wide range of different meanings and uses which surround the term. In the present context,

empowerment relates to all those ways in which employees are able to have an influence over problem-solving and decision-making. These may be the team-based means discussed in the previous chapter (such as quality circles, production meetings, and task-based teamworking), or they may be the more individual mechanisms considered in this chapter (i.e. where employees have the freedom and discretion to be spontaneous in putting forward their views, and do not need to rely on formally established channels). The evidence presented in the previous chapter suggested that, at least as far as team-based methods are concerned, the concept of empowerment may be too strong a word to describe what has occurred, since such methods are subject to significant constraints. This chapter analyses the extent to which the more individual means to employee empowerment also in fact result in something rather more limited.

The chapter considers each case study company in turn. The nature of the individual autonomy and discretion which employees have is examined, before a final section draws out the main analytical themes.

## **6.1 Auto Components**

Chapter Three described how Auto Components began with an emphasis on the “hard” production aspects of QM, but then moved to introduce an integrated package of employee communication and involvement measures. Aside from involvement through “COI groups” and through task-based teamworking, shop-floor employees are encouraged generally to take greater personal responsibility for the quality of their work. A central part of the philosophy of “continuous on-going improvement” is that operatives

are free to put their ideas forward and to suggest ways in which quality may be improved.

According to the Training and Safety Officer, giving responsibility for problem-solving to those on the shop-floor is less of a management policy and more of a necessity, given the nature of the production process:

Whereas in the traditional manufacturing areas you have a charge-hand, then a senior charge-hand, then a foreman, then a superintendent, in the modern manufacturing set up that we've got there are no layers .... and the only people that get problems sorted out are the people who are actually running the job .... There's no hierarchy to go through.

To some extent, then, the process of de-layering has had the effect of widening employee discretion and making it easier for shop-floor employees to put ideas forward directly to managers. However, other managers pointed out that the extent of employee initiative is not as widespread as they would like it to be:

I don't think we're at the stage yet where people will just pick something up and say 'Right, let's go and make an improvement on that' .... It does happen that things come straight from the shop-floor, but I'd like to see a lot more. People are still very task-orientated, which is inherent in the traditional organisation of manufacturing. (Quality Manager)

There was, in fact, a feeling among many of the managers that most employees do not feel comfortable with the consequences of de-layering, and do not actually want the freedom that "empowerment" provides them with. In the words of the Finance Manager:

A lot of people find it unusual to have their Managing Director standing over their shoulder and asking direct questions rather than coming through some sort of tiered management system. A lot of people can't actually handle the flexibility and the responsibility given to carry out their tasks.

Although managers express the view that their aim is empowerment, and that they would like to see more of it, they also made it clear that the scope of employee discretion would never extend too far, and that management will always maintain an interventionist role:

They [the employees] have got freedom in there, and that is not a problem to me .... [However,] you have got to have the right team to allow them to do it. If they were too laid back or incapable then obviously it wouldn't work. You are there over-seeing it, I mean that's what managers are for, [and] if someone's a weak link or a bit of a problem you just keep them on the straight and narrow.  
(Production Manager)

As a result of the desire to encourage employee involvement as part of the day-to-day fabric of the company, the suggestion scheme - based on cash rewards for the best suggestions - was abandoned. As the Training and Safety Officer explained:

We had a suggestion scheme whereby people got a sum of money for good suggestions .... [but] it was felt that with COI we wanted to get people voluntarily giving of their ideas and thoughts, of their skills and creativeness, and the company felt that there shouldn't be any payment for this .... We encourage people as individuals to make suggestions, and whether an individual or a team does it we always take a photo and provide recognition through the notice boards.

In order to assess employee perceptions of empowerment, those at Auto Components were firstly asked if they ever put forward informal suggestions at work. A very large proportion in the new factory (84%) and around half (52%) in the old factory said that they did (Table 6.1). As to whether anything ever changes as a result of such suggestions, similarly large numbers said that changes did occur. As for the kinds of changes that have taken place, the three most common answers vary only slightly: the highest proportion (39%) referred to "minor technical changes", with a further 36% mentioning "production / process" changes, and 25% "job specific changes".

As with previous questions regarding the response of management to ideas which are put

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forward by quality circle-type groups, employees were then asked about how willing they thought managers were to listen to more informal suggestions which may be put forward on a more *ad hoc* basis. Around two-thirds said they thought management were now more willing to listen to such suggestions, whilst a similar proportion believed that management gave them either a “great deal” or a “reasonable amount of serious consideration”.

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A final set of questions in this section aimed to assess the general level of “empowerment” that employees feel they have, by asking them to think in general terms about the nature of their involvement in problem-solving, and in particular in quality improvement. Employees at Auto Components were firstly asked if they felt their general level of involvement in problem-solving had changed since the QM strategy was introduced. As Table 6.2 shows, 84% of those in the new shop said that it had either “increased” or “increased greatly”. Of those in the old shop, a smaller number (44%) gave this response, with almost half saying their involvement in problem-solving had “not changed”. As regards the reasons why large numbers felt their involvement had increased, it is notable that the largest proportion (45.5%) referred to “COI groups”, with a far smaller number (12%) referring to the more informal involvement that comes from having “more responsibility / discretion / autonomy”.

Employees were then asked how much of their problem-solving activity they considered to be related to quality improvement. Here, 43% said a “great deal”, with almost all of the remainder saying a “fair amount”. Furthermore, 88% of employees from both factories



said that they had either a “great deal” or a “fair degree of influence” over quality. A number made comments on their questionnaires to this effect, such as:

Before we hardly did anything. Now we’re always looking out to solve problems.

Finally, employees at Auto Components were asked to rank four options in terms of which they considered allowed them to have the most influence over quality (Table 6.3). In the new shop, 80% rated “solving problems as they arise within the team” as either first or second (as did 68% in the old shop); and 48% rated “putting forward ideas at COI meetings” as in the top two categories (the proportion doing this was even higher - 62.5% - in the old shop). In stark contrast, the corresponding figures for “putting forward suggestions in a more informal way” are only 8% and 21% respectively.

At Auto Components, then, employees clearly have a strong sense of involvement in solving problems and contributing to quality improvement, and in general there would appear to be a preference among them for team-based forms of influence.

## **6.2 Office Tech**

At Office Tech, shop-floor operatives are encouraged to put their views forward, and to suggest ways in which production procedures and product quality may be improved. However, as at Auto Components, the scope of this “empowerment” has definite limits:

Workers are empowered here to identify problems, and they are empowered to come up with solutions, but they are never empowered with the implementation.  
(Finance Manager)

Technically, operatives have the power to stop the production line on two counts: one is if something clearly unsafe is happening, and the second is if they see a broken or damaged part appearing in their kit. In practice, however, the discretion of employees should never have to extend this far:

Theoretically they can stop the line, but they can inform their supervisor who can often junction the parts and remove the bad parts immediately, and those can be put in a siding and attended to whilst still keeping the main line open. So they don't tend to ever stop the line. But we do expect them to quickly pick up things that are going wrong, so someone can respond to it immediately. (Personnel Director)

When pressed, the Personnel Director acknowledged that the fact that employees in the main production area do not ever stop the line is not explicable simply in terms of the nature of the technology. Rather, it is also a matter of trust. Referring to employees who work away from the main production lines in the drum and toner plants, he said:

Invariably they will have a word with the guys they work for before they press the button [to stop the line] .... But those two areas know their product. They work in smaller teams .... and we do actually trust them to stop it.

The discretion which shop-floor employees have is limited to a fairly narrow range of job-specific issues, and to putting forward suggestions for consideration and implementation by others. When the Personnel Director was asked how wide the extent of this "empowerment" could be, he gave the following example:

At one stage we had parts on trays, and an operator said 'The commonest part I take from the bottom, and the ones I take occasionally I take from hand level, so why don't we change them round'? So he went and had a word with his supervisor, who said he should talk to the person who designs the parts selection in the tray .... And this change was implemented, and the operator only had to bend their back twice a day instead of ten times every hour.

As regards suggestion schemes, Office Tech would like to operate a scheme with what the Production and Logistics Manager calls

instant recognition [as opposed to] rewarding the big idea, and very small kaizen, small suggestions from everybody.

At present, however, the suggestion scheme is based on financial rewards. Employees receive £1 for every feasible suggestion, and then all suggestions are vetted on a monthly basis, with some going forward for a possible reward of £200. Some cynicism was expressed among managers about the motivation of employees in putting forward their ideas:

The difference between us and the Japanese is that we have to offer money for ideas (the scheme is called “bright ideas”), whereas Japanese bright ideas are channelled through quality circles .... People say that money doesn’t motivate, but I think it does .... You’ll find that towards the end of the month people will suddenly come up with 5 or 10 “bright ideas” so they can run their car until pay day. (Senior Personnel Officer)

When firstly asked if they ever put forward suggestions in an informal way, a large proportion of employees at Office Tech (79%) said that they did, and an almost equally large proportion (74%) reported that changes did occur as a result of such suggestions. When asked to describe the nature of these changes, the responses were very similar to those from employees at Auto Components, with all employees referring to changes specific to their own immediate work environment (Table 6.1). When then asked how willing they thought management were to listen to their suggestions, employees at Office Tech provided an even more up-beat assessment than those at Auto Components, with virtually four-fifths perceiving management as “more willing” to listen. Indeed, the proportion saying this at Office Tech is the highest across the four case study companies.

Similarly, Office Tech also has the largest proportion of employees reporting that management give a “great deal of serious consideration” to their views.

As regards the extent to which they considered their general level of involvement in problem-solving to have changed, the figures from Office Tech are similar to those from Auto Components, with around three out of ten employees describing their involvement as having “increased greatly”, and a slightly higher proportion (in this case 38%) saying it had “increased”. Table 6.2 also shows employees at Office Tech to be the most likely from across the four companies to say that a “great deal” of their problem-solving activity is related to quality improvement, as well as the most likely to perceive themselves as having a “great deal of influence” over quality.

As to the reasons for this increase, it is interesting to note that a far smaller proportion at Office Tech ascribed it to involvement in problem-solving teams (14% as compared with 45.5% at Auto Components), with by far the largest proportion (36%) saying their involvement had increased because they now had “more discretion” or “more autonomy” (as compared with only 12% who said this at Auto Components). This indication that employees at Office Tech may consider informal suggestions as a more fruitful route to influence than do those at the new factory at Auto Components is to some extent confirmed in Table 6.3, at least in so far as a far larger proportion ranked “putting forward suggestions in a more informal way” as either the first or second best means by which to influence quality (43.5% at Office Tech as compared to only 8% at Auto Components).

So, although employees at Office Tech certainly feel that they have an influence over problem-solving and quality, they express less of a sense of this influence being team-based than do those at Auto Components. These differences are discussed in more detail in the final section of the chapter.

### **6.3 New Bank**

Technological advances have led to the scope of many of the jobs at New Bank being considerably widened. Several managers said they believed that, as a result, employees have more responsibility, and hence are “empowered” as individuals to make a broader range of decisions. As one Branch Manager put it:

When I first joined the bank, if you did a piece of work it would be checked by one person and then checked by somebody else, but the mistakes were still there .... Now I've got a standing order clerk who puts the standing order authorities on the computer .... Because of a combination of technology (a screen which actually guides you as to what to put in) plus personal responsibility, the accuracy levels are now higher, and yet we've lost the checkers.

The same manager acknowledged, however, that the notion that this represents empowerment is contradicted by simultaneous moves towards greater standardisation, which clearly undermine employee discretion:

The work flows are controlled by section heads. The manager of a section gets the work in the morning, gives it to a member of staff and says 'You've got 2 hours work there, come back to me when you've finished it'. So work flow is still very rigidly managed. It's like being on an assembly line. Everything is timed. These O&M ["Organisation and Methods"] people come in and they ask us how long it takes to put a standing order authority on, and if we say '45 seconds', or whatever, then that is the time for that particular job. So then you can actually say to somebody 'There's 10 standing orders, that should take you 10 minutes', or whatever it is.

So, the notion that employees at New Bank have been “empowered” is highly questionable. Apart from the standardisation of tasks mentioned above, technological advances such as “credit scoring” may allow employees to provide a wider range of information to customers, but they do not have the authority to make the decisions. Jobs may cover a wider range of responsibilities, but discretion may have at the same time been reduced. These themes are pursued in more detail in Chapter Seven.

Employees at New Bank are encouraged to put their own views forward, but there remains a culture of deference and caution which mitigates against employee initiative.

As a Customer Services Manager explained:

That has been one of the major stumbling blocks. They [the employees] want to discuss everything with someone else before making a decision .... It’s the “fear factor” that has always been used in the past, when the bank have said ‘If you lend this guy money and he doesn’t pay us back, then you stand to carry the can for it’. There has been a lot of that historically in the bank, and for that reason you always wanted someone else to overview it.

Four out of five employees at New Bank said that they do put forward informal suggestions on a regular basis, and a similar proportion (74%) said that changes are usually made as a result. In line with those at the two manufacturing companies, the vast majority of employees at New Bank referred to fairly small-scale “operational” issues when asked to describe the nature of the changes, with 81% of replies falling in the same three coded categories as those at Auto Components and Office Tech (Table 6.1).

In terms of how willing they feel management are to listen to suggestions, the responses of employees at New Bank resemble closely those at Office Tech, with 72% saying there is now “more willingness” to listen, and most of the rest saying there has been “little or

no change". The degree of consideration which employees at New Bank feel managers give to their ideas is also very similar to those at Office Tech, with the marginally largest proportion (in this case 40%) perceiving management to give a "reasonable amount of serious consideration" to such ideas.

Turning to their overall impression of the level of involvement which they have in problem-solving, the responses from employees at New Bank are again similar to those at Office Tech, and also those from the new factory at Auto Components, with the largest proportion (in this case 50%) describing their involvement as having "increased" (Table 6.2). It is notable, however, that a considerably smaller proportion at New Bank opted to say it had "increased greatly". As for the reasons for this increase, employees at New Bank are even more likely than those at Office Tech to reject team-based involvement and to comment instead that their individual "discretion" and "autonomy" had increased (53% gave this response); only 10% at New Bank referred to problem-solving teamworking, compared to 45% who did so at Auto Components.

Equal proportions of employees at New Bank report that a "great deal" of problem-solving is related to quality improvement as report that they consider themselves to have a "great deal of influence" over quality (47% in each case). However, their responses to these two questions are generally somewhat less positive than those from employees at the other three companies.

Table 6.3 provides further evidence that employees at New Bank feel they have greater influence through informal and "personal" interventions, as opposed to through team-

based methods. Three-quarters of them rated “personal contact with customers” as the primary means through which they could influence quality. Perhaps more significantly, New Bank is the only one of the four companies where more employees rated “informal suggestions” first than rated “solving problems within the team” or “putting forward ideas in quality circles” in first place. Increasing personal customer contact does, however, bring with it other problems. As one employee noted:

Most of the staff .... seem to be more and more demoralised, mainly because we are the first point of contact for customers, who are not always happy with the changes that are being introduced, and do not feel the need for them.

This theme, of the downside of “empowerment” for employees in front line positions, is taken up at greater length in Chapter Seven.

## **6.4 Hotel Co**

As described in Chapter Three, the concept of empowerment is a central aspect of the TQM programme at Hotel Co. Employees have the discretion to make a range of decisions over issues which previously they would have been required to refer to others.

As the Quality Support Manager at the head office explained:

There has been a lot of discussion over the last 3 years about empowerment and people making their own decisions, and I know that is the one thing that *is* actually happening. When I came to the company 7 years ago as a Duty Manager I carried a bleep, and I was always getting bleeped, usually over a silly little thing that they could have made a decision on themselves. But, because the rules said you had to send for the Duty Manager .... then they sent for you. But now this very rarely occurs. They do solve their own problems.



As at Auto Components, many of the managers at Hotel Co believe that the process of de-layering has helped to facilitate employee empowerment:

TQM has worked here I think. It has made a difference to our staffing structures, in that we've been able to do away with levels of management through empowering people and giving more responsibility to operative level and the "shop-floor". (General Manager)

Some managers pointed to difficulties with implementing some of the "customer care" initiatives at Hotel Co, in terms of communicating the limits of empowerment to employees. A Front Desk Manager explained one of the problems she had as follows:

One of the younger members of my staff, she was only 16 or 17, went on one of the training courses called "whatever it takes" .... and it was put over in such a way that she was basically told that if someone was unhappy or complained then she could give away a free weekend .... The way I try to introduce empowerment into my department is to say that .... there are no parameters but they must deal with it in a relevant style, so that if someone gets a cold cup of coffee they don't offer them a free weekend, they get them a new cup of coffee without charging them.

More recently Hotel Co has implemented far more targeted training, through which the boundaries of employee discretion are made clear. Despite this, however, some employees remain nervous about the new responsibilities open to them:

There's a lot of staff who don't feel very comfortable with having the responsibility to make their own decisions, and they are frightened of making the wrong decision, which could have some reflection on the hotel. You can train them all the time on empowerment, but you can't make them feel the confidence to do it. (Personnel and Training Manager)

Despite much evidence that employee empowerment would appear to be somewhat more genuine at Hotel Co, nevertheless the managerial prerogative is never very far behind (something which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven). In the words of a Resident Manager:

The biggest effect that TQM has had on us has been the empowerment issue .... the fact that we as managers have given staff far more responsibility for their own decisions in their own areas, and that has realised a phenomenal amount of untapped potential in people. It has meant that the hotel is actually a great deal easier to run 90% of the time, although there is always that 10% of the time when people question you and you have to say 'No, I just want you to go and do it'.

The vast majority of employees at Hotel Co say that they do put forward informal suggestions, and exactly two-thirds report that changes are made as a result. As for the nature of these changes, once again it is "job-specific changes" which predominate, with 48% giving this answer, and a further 39% mentioning either "minor technical" or "operational" changes (Table 6.1).

As regards Hotel Co employees' conceptions of managers' attitudes towards informal suggestions, the responses follow the same pattern as across the other three companies. Firstly, a majority (60.5%) consider management to now be "more willing" to listen to suggestions, with a smaller but not insignificant proportion (in this case 32%) saying there has been "little or no change". And secondly, the largest proportion (in this case 35%) believe managers give a "reasonable amount of serious consideration" to employees' suggestions, with a smaller proportion (25%) choosing to describe the amount of consideration given as a "great deal".

Turning to perceptions of general involvement in problem-solving activity, the responses of employees at Hotel Co bear the closest resemblance to those from the new factory at Auto Components. Firstly, almost exactly the same proportion (32%) say that their involvement in problem-solving has "increased greatly", a larger proportion (40%) say it has "increased", and the rest that it has "not changed" (Table 6.2). Secondly, and perhaps

more significantly, when asked in an open-ended question the reasons for this increase, a similarly high proportion of Hotel Co employees referred to “quality circles” (48%, as compared with 45.5% at Auto Components). We have already seen that the proportions making the same response at Office Tech and New Bank were much lower (14% and 10% respectively). Complementing this, only 12% at Hotel Co and Auto Components referred to individual “discretion” and “autonomy” as the main reason for their increased involvement in problem-solving, as compared with 36% and 53% respectively at Office Tech and New Bank.

Table 6.2 also shows just over half the employees at Hotel Co saying that a “great deal” of their problem-solving activity is related to quality, a figure broadly in line with those from the other three companies. A similar pattern to the other companies is also evident in terms of perceived influence over quality, with 58% considering it to be a “great deal”. As for the means through which Hotel Co employees feel they can have the most influence over quality, the apparent preference for team-based activities suggested earlier is to some extent confirmed in Table 6.3. For instance, compared with employees at New Bank, many more at Hotel Co rated “solving problems within the team” in first place (40.5% as compared with 16%), and a higher proportion also put “quality circles” first (36% as against 14%). In contrast, although one might expect hotel employees to consider “the customer interface” as a primary avenue for influence, only 36% rated this in first place (as compared with 76% who did so at New Bank).

Despite this apparent preference for team-based approaches to problem-solving, at the same time many positive comments were made by Hotel Co employees about the concept of individual “empowerment”, such as:

The employees know how they work and what will work for them. TQM gives everybody the chance to change or solve problems. It also empowers the employees to sort queries out. It makes me feel more in control over my job.

You are taking control and not having to run to management all the time. It’s all about using your brain instead of somebody else’s.

At Hotel Co, then, employees report high levels of involvement in problem-solving, but seem to feel that there are both team-based and more individual means through which this influence can be exercised.

## **6.5 Discussion**

The previous chapter considered the nature and extent of employee influence through teamworking. This chapter has probed the issue of “empowerment” more closely by examining employees’ more general views on the means open to them to have influence. The focus has been less on team-based methods and more on individual and informal methods, and we have seen that the encouragement of individual suggestions and individual responsibility is certainly central to each of the four different QM strategies.

What this chapter has shown perhaps most clearly is that, for the majority of employees across the four companies, empowerment is certainly not a complete sham. Large numbers report that they frequently put forward informal suggestions for improvements. Obviously, it is one thing to put forward suggestions, and quite another for them to be

acted upon in a consistent way by management. However, over two-thirds of employees at each company say that this does happen. A large proportion of employees also believe that managers have become more willing to listen to their suggestions over recent years. Many more report their general involvement in problem-solving to have gone up than say it has either not changed or decreased. General levels of influence over quality are also seen as high among most employees.

Despite these broadly similar patterns emerging across the four companies, there are some interesting differences between the responses of the different groups of employees, and a closer examination of these allows some of the dynamics of empowerment to be more clearly illuminated, and allows a better explanation of the varying levels of employee commitment to the different methods.

Perhaps the most distinct difference in the data centres on the various ways through which employees feel they can and do have an influence over problem-solving and quality improvement. If we consider Auto Components first, the company have made a specific commitment to task-based teamworking in the new factory, and we saw in the previous chapter the high proportion of employees in the new shop who describe themselves as working “in a team”. Problem-solving teamworking (through COI groups) is also a well established feature, and is clearly valued by employees for the opportunity for involvement which it provides. We have seen in this chapter, however, that as well as team-based involvement, the widening of employee discretion is also seen as a key component of the overall QM strategy, and management are keen to elicit the spontaneous ideas of employees. One aspect which many managers believe facilitates this

is de-layering, which has meant that for many on the shop-floor, management have become far more accessible. And in another indication of the desire to free up the latent initiative of employees, the rewards-driven suggestion scheme has been abandoned precisely so that suggestions become part of the day-to-day fabric of the company. Overall, however, when asked about their general involvement in problem-solving, employees revealed a clear preference for COI groups as the best way of having influence, and also for task-based teams. The more informal and individual route was far less favoured.

At Office Tech, by contrast, we saw in the previous chapter how formal teamworking is marginal and underdeveloped, although many employees define themselves as working “in a team”. Problem-solving groups are also less well developed, and employees show a lower awareness of them. It is perhaps not surprising, given the parlous state of teamworking, that employees at Office Tech appear to favour informal suggestions as the best means of having influence. A note of caution needs to be introduced into the analysis at this stage, however. The higher numbers favouring informal means to solve problems at Office Tech should of course not necessarily be taken as a reflection of their having a greater influence through such means than their counterparts at Auto Components. Rather, it may well be that because of the far more advanced nature of team and group working at Auto Components, then employees there are bound to consider informal means as relatively less significant, despite the fact that they may still have as many opportunities for influence through such means as do those at Office Tech. In other words, although there are relative differences in emphasis between the two companies, the absolute level of employee involvement may well be greater at Auto Components.

At New Bank it is much harder to identify task-based teams, and although many employees say they work “in a team”, they follow those at Office Tech in having a weak definition of “teamworking”. The previous chapter showed that problem-solving teamwork is also less well developed at New Bank, and quality circle-type groups are only now being re-launched. Despite the lack of involvement through teams, many managers at the bank believe that employees have become rapidly “empowered” through new technology and through big increases in the extent of their personal responsibility and discretion. However, it is notable that although individual autonomy and discretion are expressed as the favoured means of influence for New Bank employees, even here they do not consider their influence over problem-solving to be as great as do those from the other companies. Perhaps this reflects the problems identified in Chapter Four regarding the pace of change at New Bank. For when employees are given greater discretion, such as through more personal contact with customers, they report having to deal with complaints about changes and a perceived decline in the quality of service. In this climate, being given freedom and discretion is more likely to lead to feelings of constant fire-fighting, rather than ones of “empowerment”.

At Hotel Co, a good deal of functional flexibility exists between employees in the same work areas, and we saw in Chapter Five that a relatively high proportion describe themselves as working “in a team”. Problem-solving groups, in the form of quality circles, have also been a central feature of the TQM programme, and employees have very positive attitudes towards them. The encouragement of employees’ individual contributions is also a central part of the QM strategy, and managers at Hotel Co talk of “empowerment” more than those at any of the other case study companies. As at Auto

Components, they comment how the de-layering process has given rise to increasing input from the lower levels of the organisational hierarchy.

What comes through from this chapter is that, as at Auto Components, employees at Hotel Co tend in general to favour problem-solving teams when asked what the best means of influence is. However, although the more individual involvement scores relatively low, nevertheless many employees made favourable comments about the extent of empowerment, and felt that their own personal discretion and decision-making responsibilities had clearly increased.

We have seen that increases in employee discretion and autonomy have been experienced as genuine. At the same time, however, the scope of this “empowerment” is clearly circumscribed. At Auto Components, discretion and autonomy apply only to a narrow range of job-specific tasks. At Office Tech, discretion is similarly limited, employees do not have the power to stop the production line, and it would appear that management would not trust the majority of them to do so anyway. At New Bank, the standardisation of procedures severely limits the real discretion that employees have, even if they do now have a greater level of contact with customers. What has also come through clearly is that managers intervene to control empowerment, and employees are certainly not left free to do as they will. This was evident from the comments of managers at Auto Components, as well as at Hotel Co. Indeed, although increasing employee empowerment may be the espoused aim, the managerial prerogative is never far behind.



In Chapter Five we saw that management at all four case study organisations wish to increasingly control or limit the extent of employee influence through teamworking. Task-based teams are limited in their scope of influence, whilst problem-solving teams are more managerially-led and *ad hoc*. However, although “empowerment through teamwork” may be an overstatement, employees do value the increasing involvement that such team-based methods provide them with (albeit that they are within certain limits). And the same would appear to be true of other more “individual” forms of influence. Generally employees feel they have had a genuine increase in discretion and autonomy, that it is easier to put ideas forward, and moreover, that management are more likely now to follow these ideas up. At the same time, however, the scope of this “empowerment” is clearly limited, both in terms of the range of issues to which it applies, and in terms of the extent of real freedom from management intervention.

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

### MANAGEMENT CONTROL - WORK INTENSIFICATION

In terms of the broad distinction drawn in Chapter One between the “optimistic” and the “exploitation” models of QM, the two previous chapters can be seen to have examined one side of the equation; namely, the evidence for the optimistic view that QM leads to “employee empowerment”, through both team-based involvement (considered in Chapter Five) and through more informal forms of individual discretion and autonomy (considered in Chapter Six). This chapter begins the analysis of the other side of the equation, examining more closely those aspects of QM which are commonly said to lead to a consolidation or increase in management control.

This chapter is primarily concerned with examining the argument that the monitoring and measurement of quality goes together with an intensification of work, and consequent increases in effort levels and stress for employees. As discussed in Chapter One, a burgeoning literature has developed around these issues in recent years, with the potential for the monitoring and surveillance capacities of QM to lead to unacceptable levels of pressure on employees being a major theme (cf. McArdle *et al.*, 1995; Sewell and B. Wilkinson, 1992). The negative implications for employees of attempts to measure and quantify the effectiveness of quality initiatives have also been discussed (cf. Preece and Wood, 1995). So, what evidence is there that QM has led to an intensification of work in the four case study organisations? Are employees working harder, and if so, in what ways? What are the major sources of pressure and stress? In considering these questions,

the analysis is sensitive to the opinions and perceptions of employees themselves. As a consequence, when evidence of apparent work intensification is presented, the conclusions that can be drawn may not be as straightforward as they first appear.

Another broad argument is also briefly considered in the chapter; namely, that pay and appraisal systems are used to tie employees' efforts more closely to quality, and that this too is a source of pressure and stress. As with the issue of empowerment in the previous chapter, once again the prescriptive quality "gurus" have little to say on the links between quality management and performance appraisal. Or to be more accurate, they are in fact actively hostile towards conventional methods of appraising and rewarding performance, believing that if QM is implemented properly then employees should be voluntarily committed to it, and should not need to be coerced into acceptance through a system of external rewards and punishments (cf. Crosby, 1979; Deming, 1986). The reality, however, is that most QM organisations do implement some form of performance appraisal system, with the intention that it will enhance and sustain the process of continuous organisational improvement (cf. Simmons, Shadur and Preston, 1995), although in practice it has been found that such aspirations are rarely achieved (cf. Snape, Redman and Bamber, 1994). This chapter considers the extent to which each case study organisation has attempted to link appraisal to quality issues, and employees' own attitudes towards pay and appraisal are briefly described.

These two arguments are considered in turn, after which a final section draws out the main themes from the chapter, and assesses the extent to which management control has been consolidated in each of the four organisations through an intensification of work.

## 7.1 Effort Levels and the Monitoring of Quality

### 7.1.1 Auto Components

At Auto Components, the quality monitoring system is most advanced in the new factory.

Here, a combination of “traffic lights” on the production line indicates when certain steps need to be taken, and is designed to assist the steady flow of work between different cells.

As the Quality Manager explained:

In our new shop there is an automated facility, and if the line breaks down then a red light will come on .... People can respond to lights, and they are not just red and green “stop” and “go” lights .... Different coloured lights will come on, for instance a white light, which means it’s time to have a “health check” and take a few pieces off for measurement. That’s part of the process.

A range of statistical process control measures are used to monitor product quality, and standardisation also arises as a consequence of the requirements of BS5750, the effects of which go far beyond the shop-floor. In the words of the Finance Manager:

Documenting procedures .... will place some restrictions on what we can do .... 5750 originally started in production areas but has now worked it’s way through the company right down to finance, sales and administration, which are now all required to document the things that they do.

The requirement to have more accurate quality measures has also arisen from other sources, such as the “Investors in People” criteria and stricter customer auditing procedures, and so a variety of indicators are utilised:

We have a whole range of benchmarks - customer concerns, accidents, the amount of training days that we’ve done. We’ve got some fairly significant benchmarks for measuring “total quality management”. And you can see year by year an improvement or a decrease in customer concerns, which is when a customer gets either a bad product, or it’s in bad packaging, or they get anything which is not

what they ordered .... These are the benchmarks that we can actually use.  
(Training and Safety Officer)

Employees at Auto Components were asked a wide range of questions about the effects of quality monitoring procedures and the nature of any work intensification. Firstly, they were asked if they ever had discussions among themselves about the appropriate amount of effort to put into their work. Just over half said that they did, and of these, over two-thirds indicated that the views expressed in these discussions were normally different from managerial expectations (Table 7.1). When asked what the outcome of this difference usually is, the largest proportion (42%) said that managers expect employees to be able to do more, but that employees “usually do what we think is acceptable”. A typical comment was:

Management expect too much because on paper it looks easy, and it may involve more than they realise. We usually do our best in the situation.

A more revealing picture of changes in effort levels is evident from the responses to the next set of questions. When asked if they felt they were working harder now than three years ago, over two-thirds of those in the old shop said “yes”, a proportion similar to the other three companies (Table 7.2). In stark contrast, almost two-thirds from the new shop (64%) replied “no”. And when given a choice of ways in which they may be working harder, by far the largest proportion in the old shop referred to “the intensity with which each minute is worked” as having increased, whilst most of those in the new shop chose instead to say that “more of the working day is spent actually working”.

Employees at Auto Components were then invited to suggest their own reasons why they thought that effort levels had increased. The highest proportion (37%) referred to there

having been an “increase in production”, leading to a higher workload. A further 25% said that machines had been “speeded up” and that “technology dictates the pace of work”:

Because it's flow line, the technology sets the pace to a degree .... We don't have any choice because most of the work is through-feed, and you have to keep up.

The speed of the press is governed by the engineers. They can change it up or down. They've been experimenting with speeds on the presses, I suppose to see how much production they can get out. If they can get 100 parts an hour out of you without any pressure, they might turn it up to 110.

The vast majority of employees at Auto Components (84%) said that it was necessary to work as hard as they did, and when asked to say why this was, by far the largest proportion (41%) said that it was necessary in order to “hit production schedules / output targets” or to “meet deadlines” (Table 7.3). A further question sought to probe more closely the specific influences upon working hard. Here, “targets concerning output or volume” scored highest, with 76% describing them as an “important influence” on working hard (Table 7.4). A large proportion (60%) also rated “a machine or technology on the production line” similarly highly. It is notable, however, that as many as 62% also rated their “own discretion” as an important influence.

There is, then, evidence of technology and of production targets leading to feelings of work being harder. However, what stands out from these questions on effort levels are the responses in Table 7.5, which show over three-quarters of employees at Auto Components saying they enjoy working as hard as they do, with only 24% saying they do not enjoy it. When asked why they enjoyed it, the largest proportion (44%) said that working hard “passes the time” and “makes the day go quicker”. Employees were also

asked what they considered the negative aspects of working this hard to be, and two-thirds at Auto Components referred to the “boredom” and “monotony”:

7.30 - 12.30 is a long time to work without a break. It is pure boredom. That's what we're paid for.

[The work is] monotonous, same thing day in and day out, standing in a few square feet. This [completing the questionnaire] is the most enjoyable thing that's happened to me at work in a long time.

Moving from the issue of effort levels, employees were then asked a series of questions about monitoring and surveillance. Although 38% said they were aware either to a “great extent” or a “reasonable extent” of monitoring and surveillance, this is the smallest proportion from across the four companies to say this. And an almost equally high proportion at Auto Components (36%) said that they were “not aware at all” (Table 7.6).

As for the nature of monitoring and surveillance, the largest proportions in both the old and the new shop referred to management and supervisor “over the shoulder presence”, or what many simply called “spying”. Others referred to the monitoring of work through “production targets”, as well as through “traceability”, as a result of having to “book work onto the computer”:

Management can look at output figures. On a furnace everything is booked in, so they can see how much you've done.

SPC records - management are always looking at these .... You have your own number, so they know how much you've done.

When asked how the level of monitoring and surveillance had changed over recent years, employees at Auto Components were again less likely to say it had increased than those from the other two companies where this question was asked (Table 7.7). And there is

once again an interesting contrast between the responses of those from the old and the new factories, with 21% of those from the old saying monitoring and surveillance had “increased greatly”, as opposed to only 4% saying this from the new shop. Moreover, 20% from the new shop said it had actually “decreased a little”.

As for the ways in which monitoring and surveillance had increased, a large proportion from the old shop (54.5%) again referred to the need to “book work onto the computer”. Of those in the new shop who said it had decreased, the reason given was that employees are increasingly “left to do the job ourselves”, with “not so much supervision”. There is, then, some contradictory evidence, with a number of employees from both the new and the old shop stating that there is in fact *less* “over the shoulder” presence:

Monitoring of work as regards SPC and so on has gone up over the last few years. Monitoring as regards technology has gone up. But in terms of management watching what I’m doing, this has not gone up. We used to have foremen, but now management has a policy of trusting individual employees.

When then asked if they were aware of any other ways in which their work was monitored, most who had not previously done so mentioned the fact of having to “enter data on a computer at specific times”, and that “everything has to be logged in” (Table 7.8).

Employees at Auto Components were then asked a series of questions designed to assess the extent of feelings of pressure or stress. Firstly, they were asked if they ever feel under pressure from other team members (or in the case of those in the old shop who do not work in designated teams, from “other workers on the production line”). As Table 7.10 shows, around half in the new shop (48%) said they “rarely” or “never” felt such



pressure, with the other half saying they either “sometimes” or “always” did. The proportion saying the latter in the old shop was only 20%, the lowest proportion from across the four companies. As for the nature of this pressure, large numbers mentioned feeling a “general pressure to go along with the majority” or to “work faster”:

Being in a team means we do jobs in different ways, and have to leave the machine incomplete for other people to use. This creates not actually conflict, but it is one difficulty of not working on one particular machine all the while, but having a few people working on it.

They [the team] rib you sometimes, and if you make a mistake they’ll pick you up on it.

As for feelings of pressure from technology (Table 7.11), here the proportions from the new and the old shop saying they either “sometimes” or “always” feel pressure are very similar (40% and 42% respectively), although again significantly more from the old shop say they “never” feel such pressure (50% as opposed to 32% in the new shop). Reflecting earlier responses about the monitoring of work, most said that the pressure they feel results from the technology “setting the pace of work”, in particular “setting line speeds”.

Employees were then asked a general question about the frequency with which they feel under pressure or stress at work (Table 7.12). The largest proportion in both the new and the old shop answered “sometimes” (52% and 36% respectively). Most of the remainder replied “rarely” or “never” (36% and 40% respectively), which is considerably more than did so at the other three companies.

Finally in this section, employees at Auto Components were asked how strict they considered management to be in terms of discipline, and on which particular issues they

felt management had become more or less strict (Table 7.13). The responses are revealing. In both the new and the old factories, by far the largest proportion said that there had been “little or no change” with respect to the strictness of discipline (60% and 68% respectively). Only very few, and considerably less than at the other three companies, chose to say it was now “more strict” (12% and 16%). However, it is striking that when asked about three specific issues (absenteeism, persistent lateness and poor quality work), on all of these by far the largest proportions said management were now in fact *more* strict. This was especially the case with those in the old shop, with 68% saying management were now “more strict” on absenteeism and persistent lateness.

In summary, employees at Auto Components clearly feel that their effort levels have increased under QM, and that production technologies and stricter targets have lead to a degree of work intensification. At the same time, however, there is some evidence that supervision is not so tight. Moreover, we have also seen that the “exploitation model” account of such changes may not be appropriate, in so far as “traffic lights” on the production line can not automatically be assumed to lead to heightened pressure on employees, and harder work may actually be welcomed.

#### 7.1.2 Office Tech

In a similar fashion to Auto Components, Office Tech also operates a system of “traffic lights” in the main production area, and managers again point to the benefits which this has in terms of smoothing the flow of work:

We have a system of warning devices, like lights on the work stations, and they can then call a rectifier or a quality person or a supervisor and explain the problem, so that the line continues working and there is time to sort something out before it gets to the end. (Finance Manager)

As regards measuring quality, the quality assurance department has introduced a range of product quality checks, and statistical process control measures are utilised in all the manufacturing areas. Whilst managers at Auto Components were generally reticent to do so, most of the managers at Office Tech acknowledged that quality monitoring techniques may be perceived as oppressive by employees. Some, however, believe that employees should balance this perception against the relative job security which they enjoy:

If a traffic light comes on it doesn't worry them [the Japanese workers] that they are perceived .... as failing, it is just that the product is incorrect and needs to be sorted out. This works great in Japan, but when you bring it over here some people immediately see it as pointing the finger at the individual .... If they analysed the situation and related it [to the fact that] we don't have redundancies and we do protect jobs, they would follow our understanding. But I don't think they relate the two. They see them as two separate things. (Finance Manager)

Other managers were more prepared to acknowledge the pressures which employees may be under, as a result of higher workloads and the monotony of carrying out routine tasks:

It isn't a case of chaining people to the line in galley slave style and working them to death. It's not *quite* as bad as that. But there are a lot of traditional techniques. (Senior Personnel Officer)

The Senior Personnel Officer was in fact surprisingly open in describing how the QM strategy had not led to the replacement of traditional techniques on the production line:

This is the skeleton in our closet. We have this sort of outward facade where we say we are a very liberal and progressive organisation, and yet down in the bowels of the manufacturing departments we still produce things the way Henry Ford produced cars .... I'm sure F.W. Taylor would be very proud of the way we are putting photo-copiers together at the latter end of the twentieth century .... I find it a little bit tongue-in-cheek when I have to stand up in front of people and use all the modern management and business phrases - "empowerment", "involvement",

“participation”, “working towards a common goal”, and all that sort of thing - [when] a lot of it is bullshit.

Table 7.1 shows 40.5% of employees at Office Tech saying they discuss with their workmates the appropriate amount of effort to put in to their work, and just over half of these feel the ideas put forward are usually different from managerial expectations. Although the number responding is low, as at Auto Components there is a feeling that “management expect more”, but that employees are usually able to “do what we think is acceptable”.

As regards whether they feel they are working harder now than three years ago, a large proportion at Office Tech (75.5%) feel that they are, and roughly equal numbers reported that “more of the working day is spent actually working” as reported that “the intensity with which each minute is worked has increased” (Table 7.2). As for the reasons for having to now work harder, the largest proportion at Office Tech referred to the same issues as did the largest proportion at Auto Components; namely, that there had been an “increase in production” and an “increase in workload”. Employees at Office Tech were also asked about the extent of influence of various factors on their effort levels. The responses reflect closely those of employees at Auto Components (Table 7.4). That is, the two most influential issues were considered to be “targets concerning output or volume” (64% describing this as an “important influence”) and “your own discretion” (67%).

Turning to the monitoring and surveillance of their work, 43% of employees at Office Tech said they were aware of this happening either to a “reasonable extent” or a “great extent”, a figure similar to the 38% who reported the same at Auto Components (Table

7.6). Where these two sets of respondents diverge sharply, however, is on the open-ended question which asked about the nature of this monitoring and surveillance. The largest proportion at Auto Components had referred to the “over the shoulder presence” of managers and supervisors. Around one quarter (26%) at Office Tech also referred to this:

Members of the quality assurance department regularly check by observation and questions that standards are met.

However, by far the largest proportion at Office Tech (47%) referred simply to “appraisal”, something which was virtually not mentioned at all at Auto Components. This clearly hints at the importance of appraisal in shaping employee attitudes at Office Tech, something which is considered in more detail later in this chapter. A number also mentioned the effect of having to conform to line speeds. As at Auto Components, technology clearly influences pace of work:

We are governed by tack times on the line - by start and stop times.

Line speed varies according to demand. When targets have to be met one’s concentration is taxed by the number of minutes and seconds you are allowed per machine.

When then asked if they were aware of any other means of monitoring and surveillance, a number mentioned having to “enter data on computer”, as well as “production schedules and targets”. Interestingly, however, the highest proportion at Office Tech (39%) referred to “customer feedback” through questionnaires and reject reports (Table 7.8).

Employees at Office Tech were also asked about feelings of pressure from team members or others on the production line (Table 7.10), as well as pressure from technology (Table 7.11). The largest proportion (44%) reported “rarely” feeling pressure from team

members or other workers, although exactly one-third said they “sometimes” or “always” felt such pressure. As for the nature of this pressure, the response here was low, but a “general pressure” to conform with the majority seemed evident. When asked about pressure from technology, the responses of employees at Office Tech are very similar to those from the old factory at Auto Components; that is, around one in ten said they “always” felt under pressure, whilst just about half of the sample reported “never” feeling such pressure. Again responses to the follow-up question were low, but technology “influencing the pace of work” was mentioned.

Employees at Office Tech were then asked one more general question about the frequency of feelings of pressure or stress. As at Auto Components, the highest proportion (in this case 42%) reported “sometimes” feeling pressure or stress, although a large proportion (39%) opted to say that they experienced pressure or stress either “often”, “very often” or “constantly” (Table 7.12).

As regards the final questions relating to discipline, a far larger proportion at Office Tech (58%) said that in general management were now “more strict” (Table 7.13). Indeed, this is by some way the highest proportion of employees to say this across the four companies. Interestingly, however, when asked about three specific issues, a still larger number reported that management had become “more strict”, with 83% saying this was the case with respect to absenteeism.

So, in a similar fashion to Auto Components, the data at Office Tech does not point to uniform work intensification, although there is clearly tighter discipline, perhaps

especially via appraisal. However, once again it is necessary to temper the “exploitation model” interpretation, which tends to characterise such firms as just tightly autocratic. Whilst there are elements of autocracy, we have seen here that this can in some ways be welcomed, and - as discussed later in this chapter - employees do not necessarily perceive the appraisal system to be oppressive.

### 7.1.3 New Bank

The main focus for the measurement of quality at New Bank is customer feedback. Customer questionnaires are widely used, and the data which they produce are relayed directly back to employees. As a Branch Manager explained:

Each quarter 150 of my customers are written to with a questionnaire which covers all aspects of customer service - privacy, politeness of cashiers. You can see a trend .... Our customers are telling us that the cashiers don't care, that they are indifferent to customers, and are not as polite as they used to be .... I've spoken to every cashier individually, telling them that this is what our customers think about us.

The use of customer surveys at New Bank illustrates the difficulty of attempting to measure the success of QM, in the sense that those customers who complete the surveys tend to be those who wish to highlight problems:

The people who want to say something will say it, and it's usually the people who want to complain. That is one of the big problems with the “customer satisfaction index”. (Branch Manager)

In line with their counterparts at the two manufacturing firms, most managers at New Bank argue that the monitoring of quality - through such techniques as customer

questionnaires and so-called “mystery shoppers” - is not intended as a means to put pressure on staff. As regards “mystery shoppers”, for instance:

We get two visits a quarter from someone from an agency, who is well primed and well trained, and discusses a particular service with a member of my team, and we get marked on that. But .... we try and look at the results sensibly and ask ‘How can we improve’? and ‘Is there more training required’? (Branch Manager)

At the same time, there is a readiness to acknowledge that the greater emphasis on the detailed measurement and timing of jobs, together with staff shortages and stricter targets, has clearly led to employees being under greater pressure:

[There are] pressures within branches to get targets. The pressures to hit targets these days are phenomenal. (Branch Manager)

Slightly fewer employees at New Bank than at the other companies said that they have discussions about the appropriate amount of effort to put into their work. And of these, a considerably smaller proportion (23.5%) said that the ideas generated were different from managerial expectations (Table 7.1). Around two-thirds reported that they are now working harder than three years ago, with all but 4% of these reporting that there had been an increase in “the intensity with which each minute is worked” (Table 7.2).

When asked in an open-ended question the reasons why there had been an increase in effort levels, by far the largest proportion of employees at New Bank (57%) referred to there being “less people doing more work” on account of the “reduction in manning levels”. A further 27% said there had been an “increase in workload”:

The individual job descriptions within the branch have changed, and the number of staff has decreased, so that each member of staff has more tasks to perform.

When staff leave or get transferred there seems to be no desperate desire to replace them. We have to cover and make do.



The quicker you work, the more they expect. This can cause stress to some people, which eventually defeats the object as their work level decreases when stressed.

Table 7.3 shows the vast majority (88%) saying they believe it is necessary to work as hard as they do. And the main reason it is deemed necessary is to “hit schedules and targets” (particularly sales targets), and to “meet deadlines” (28%):

My manager is aware of work output by monitoring systems. There is greater pressure from targets, and the finer details of performance are now measured, i.e. broken down into smaller topics.

I don't like to be pressured, so I find it difficult to put pressure on customers unless I feel I will be of some use to them .... With the targets you are given things are pushed too far sometimes. There's too much pressure to sell products.

As regards some of the specific influences upon effort levels (Table 7.4), in line with the two manufacturing firms, targets again scores highly (76% saying they have either “some influence” or an “important influence”), as do external clients or customers (85%). Once again, however, employees' own discretion is considered to be the most important factor (with 98% ascribing it either “some influence” or an “important influence”).

When then asked if they enjoyed working hard, as many as 95% at New Bank said that they did, which is easily the highest proportion to do so from across the four companies (Table 7.5). Moreover, New Bank employees are very clear about the reasons they enjoy working hard, with 65% saying that they “take pride in their work” and find it “rewarding and challenging”. At the same time, however, there is clearly a downside to this job satisfaction, with 36% saying they feel stress and a “pressure to perform”, and a further 22% saying that the high workload and long hours lead to “fatigue and tiredness”. In a further two questions which were put only to those at New Bank, 44% reported feeling

stress as a result of monitoring (Table 7.9), with half of these referring to the pressure of having to meet targets and do “a set amount of work” within a particular time. Typical comments were:

Timings have been taken for all tasks, and are monitored to see if we have done enough in a day. Therefore we can do so many tasks in a day - time and motion. Some days you may not be feeling 100%, and the “tired” factor is not taken into account.

It’s bad enough worrying about whether you will be made redundant. But having the pressure to sell on top is sometimes too much.

Staff are mentally tired. Sickness is rife. More days will inevitably be lost as staff who would normally struggle in decide that they are not well enough to do the work of two whilst feeling ill. This puts more strain on those who do turn up for work.

Turning to the issue of monitoring and surveillance, as many as 47% of employees at New Bank said they were aware of this to a “great extent”, which is by far the largest proportion to do so across the four companies (Table 7.6). And they are also fairly unambiguous about the form which this monitoring and surveillance takes. In an open-ended question, 58% mentioned “productivity management statistics”, with many referring to this as “work measurement” or “time and motion”. As one employee commented:

Forms are completed daily showing exactly what you have done that day. You have to be accountable for every minute of your working day.

Taken together with the further 13% who mentioned “self-monitoring” through “recording what I have done”, we are left with only 16% referring to the “over the shoulder presence” of managers and supervisors, which is easily the lowest proportion to do so from the four cases.

Not only are employees at New Bank more aware of monitoring and surveillance, they are also far more likely to report that it has increased (Table 7.7). Indeed, over half (52%) said that it had “increased greatly”. And once again they were very clear about the ways in which it had increased, with 62% referring to “productivity management statistics”:

We have to mark down every customer that comes in and put down the time spent .... We’re only given three minutes to deal with the initial customer query, and then further time under other headings .... I’m worried that if the stats don’t come out properly, my job is in danger.

You feel that sometimes you have been working hard all day, and yet the stats show that you haven’t.

As regards specific pressures from either other team members or from technology, the responses of employees at New Bank are not vastly dissimilar to those at the two manufacturing firms (Tables 7.10 and 7.11). Three out of ten report “sometimes” feeling pressure from other employees, with 42% of these referring to a “general pressure to go along with the majority”. And 24% report either “sometimes” or “always” feeling pressure from technology, which is seen by some as “influencing the pace of work”.

A final two questions on this issue revealed 42.5% at New Bank saying that they either “often”, “very often” or “constantly” feel under pressure or stress, which is a higher proportion than at the two manufacturing firms (Table 7.12). And most of these said the source of this stress was the “volume of work required” and the “pressure to meet deadlines”.

Finally, the questions on discipline revealed a similar pattern of responses to those given by employees at Auto Components and Office Tech (Table 7.13). That is, whilst only a

relatively small proportion of employees (in this case 27%) chose to say that management were now in general “more strict” in terms of discipline, considerably higher proportions reported an increase in strictness in terms of particular issues. At New Bank, “poor quality work” stands out, with 68% saying that management are now “more strict” in their attitude to this.

At New Bank, then, we have perhaps the clearest evidence yet of work intensification. The picture emerging is one of staff shortages, strict sales targets, and far closer monitoring and measurement of work tasks, all leading in consequence to widespread feelings of pressure and stress. It is again notable, however, that even in this context the majority of employees report that they find their work enjoyable and satisfying.

#### 7.1.4 Hotel Co

As at New Bank, Hotel Co utilises a number of techniques in an attempt to gauge the effect of QM on customer satisfaction. Guest questionnaires are used widely, each department in a hotel has measurement boards displaying levels of quality-related activity, and customer “comment cards” are collated at head office and the results relayed back to individual hotels. As one General Manager put it:

We measure it [customer satisfaction] in a lot of different ways. We have the [Hotel Co] questionnaires. We have customer calls, where we phone people 10 minutes after they've got to their room and record it, talk to people in the morning and record it. We get a lot more feedback than we used to, and we act on it.

Despite the range of methods used, managers at Hotel Co report the same difficulties with measuring customer feedback as their counterparts at New Bank:

The problem can be that if you keep asking guests for more and more feedback and going out there and making things better, then you raise your customers' expectations .... And then you seem to be delivering perpetually worse and worse service, and staff get more and more disillusioned. (General Manager)

Moreover, there is dissatisfaction expressed by a number of managers about some of the measures used, as illustrated by the following comments from one General Manager:

At the moment there's a measure which tells you how many of your staff are working on a quality management associated activity. So, you could say that if you have 30 staff, and 15 are in quality circles, then you have 50% involved in TQM. But then again you could say that all the staff are, because they're all empowered to make decisions relating to their own work area. Or you could say that in my case, because I don't have any action teams running at the moment, then I don't have anyone involved. So it's all to do with how you look at it, and it's a very vague measure.

The problem of assessing levels of "quality management associated activity" in different hotels appears to be exacerbated by the varying degrees of commitment shown to the documentation of such activity:

Some managers in the group are very good at promoting themselves, in that they write everything about TQM down .... [They] rattle off all this TQM stuff to you, and you think 'Bloody hell, they've got fifteen action teams all doing this that and the other'. But when you actually look at it, they're not doing anything different to what you're doing, they're just defining it as part of that process. (General Manager)

Managers at Hotel Co are quick to acknowledge that the increasing measurement and monitoring of quality leads to heightened pressures on employees. In the words of a Personnel and Training Manager:

If you spoke to the staff here they would say the pressures are really very very high now, because they are more involved in the process, and more is expected of them to achieve results .... and because they are being measured all the time, they are under closer scrutiny .... Our workforce is certainly less in number than it's ever been, and that puts untold pressures on the people who are left. We watch them more closely and .... that does put pressure on them.

Table 7.1 shows 62% of employees at Hotel Co confirming that they have discussions among themselves over effort levels, which is the highest proportion to say this from across the four companies, and around one-third of these say that these discussions generate ideas which are normally different from management expectations.

As many as 74% at Hotel Co say that they are now working harder than three years previously, second only to the 76% who said this at Office Tech (Table 7.2). And the great majority at Hotel Co (93%) report an increase in “the intensity with which each minute is worked”. When then asked an open-ended question about the general reasons for the increase in effort levels, the two most popular responses are the same as those from employees at New Bank; in this case, 26% at Hotel Co referred to an “increasing workload”, and a further 22% to the fact of “less people doing more work”:

When staff levels are inadequate it feels like everyone is exhausted, and when you are dealing face-to-face with customers it is not good for the company image.

The way the shifts work with the staff we’ve got doesn’t work well, because at times you are doing two people’s work for the same money.

Regarding more specific influences on working hard, the responses of Hotel Co employees are also similar to those at New Bank (Table 7.4), with employees’ “own discretion” scoring highest (78% rating it as an “important influence”), and “clients or customers” also scoring highly (73%).

The views of employees at Hotel Co also concur with those at New Bank to the extent that not only do a very high proportion (in this case 83%) report that they enjoy working as hard as they do (Table 7.5), but also by far the largest proportion (in this case 71%)

advance the same reason for this, namely that the work is “rewarding and challenging” and thus leads to “job satisfaction”. In contrast, only 9.7% of employees at Hotel Co said that they preferred to work hard because it “made the day go quicker” (compared - for instance - to the 44% at Auto Components who gave this response).

As regards the negative aspects of working hard, the responses of employees at Hotel Co are again rather different from those at Auto Components, and closer to those at New Bank. Only 7% mentioned feelings of “boredom and monotony” (compared to the 66% who did so at Auto Components). Instead, the most common complaint (50%) was that “long hours” and a generally “high workload” lead to feelings of “tiredness and fatigue”.

Turning to the issue of monitoring and surveillance, a far smaller proportion of employees at Hotel Co than at New Bank said they were aware of this to a “great extent” (8% compared to 47%). However, a significant proportion (54%) did report being aware of it to a “reasonable extent” (Table 7.6). As for the nature of this monitoring and surveillance, the responses of employees at Hotel Co split into three key areas. The largest proportion (27%) referred to “supervisor and management feedback”, a slightly smaller proportion (21%) to the “over the shoulder presence” of managers and supervisors, and a further 21% to a variety of “quality assurance checks” (such as work lists and room checks):

There are basic checklists, a daily thing for each shift .... The work itself (phones, customers) dictates the pace of work, i.e. the volume of customers.

The supervisor is always behind the [reception] desk with me. Also they check the checklists every day. [By contrast] in the restaurant you are not always being watched.

Where the responses of Hotel Co employees diverge sharply from those at New Bank is over the extent of any perceived increase in monitoring and surveillance (Table 7.7). Whilst over half of the sample at New Bank said that it had “increased greatly”, the proportion saying this at Hotel Co was only 13%, with 41% saying there had in fact been “no change”. Of those who felt it had increased, the largest proportion (45.5%) again pointed to the increase in a variety of “quality assurance checks”.

When asked if they were aware of any other means of monitoring and surveillance, a large proportion of employees at Hotel Co (70.5%) said that they were (Table 7.8), and in an open-ended question a wide variety of different methods were mentioned, such as “customer feedback / questionnaires” (28%), “assessment / appraisal” (14%), and “managers talking to supervisors / other staff” (10%).

As to whether employees at Hotel feel under pressure from other employees, their perceptions mirror closely those of employees at New Bank, with 36% saying that they either “sometimes” or “always” feel such pressure, and a larger proportion (in this case 45%) saying that they “rarely” do (Table 7.10). And as at New Bank, most employees at Hotel Co (53%) describe this pressure as a “general pressure to go along with the majority”. Overall, the frequency with which Hotel Co employees report feeling pressure or stress is similar to that reported by those at New Bank and at Office Tech (Table 7.12), to the extent that the largest proportion (in this case 38%) opted to say they “sometimes” feel pressure or stress. At Hotel Co, however, a slightly higher proportion than at the other two companies (60%) reported that they either “often”, “very often” or “constantly” feel pressure or stress.



Once more, the questions on discipline reveal a general view that there has been “little or no change” in the approach of management (52.5% saying this), with a relatively small number (in this case 22.5%) saying they are now “more strict” (Table 7.13). When questioned about specific issues, however, by far the largest proportion of employees at Hotel Co said that management had become “more strict”. As at New Bank, “poor quality work” is something over which the largest proportion of employees (in this case 76%) report a change in the direction of increased strictness.

The closer monitoring and measurement of work at Hotel Co is clearly precipitating feelings of pressure and stress among employees, albeit they appear less extreme as at New Bank. A majority report that work is harder, primarily as a consequence of higher workloads and reduced manning levels. As a result, however, work is once again described by many to be more rewarding and challenging.

## **7.2 Pay and Appraisal**

This section highlights very briefly some of the key aspects of pay and appraisal at each of the four case study organisations, before going on to discuss employee attitudes towards them. It focuses primarily upon employees’ general levels of awareness of pay and appraisal systems. The issue of whether and to what extent these systems have heightened the pressure and stress on employees is considered more fully in the “Discussion” section which follows.

### 7.2.1 Pay and Appraisal at Four Case Study Organisations

Pay bargaining at Auto Components takes place at a local level between the full-time Union Convenor and the Works Director. At the time that the case studies were carried out, the company was in the last year of a five-year pay deal, something which appeared to have met with the unanimous approval of all concerned. The agreement provided for a pay increase of 9% up front, followed by an increase each year of inflation or 4% (whichever was the higher). In the words of the Manufacturing Manager:

We are just coming into the last year of a five-year pay deal. A lot of British companies would give their right arm for that .... We've had five years of absolutely no industrial unrest, and the workforce have known that, as their annual pay came up, they were going to get a certain percentage. They knew what was coming, no hassle.

Auto Components does not operate any formal appraisal system for shop-floor employees. In contrast, at Office Tech a very standardised method of appraisal is used at operative level, and pay rises are directly linked to two particular issues; namely, attendance and quality of work:

To a lot of people on the shop-floor it's new .... They may not like it, but the majority of them agreed with the result, because the result is so simple. It basically talks about ten components on the shop-floor, of which two you have got to get right. One is your attendance, the other one is your quality of work. If you fail on any of those, you are dead. (Personnel Director)

As regards pay, the problems encountered when the parent company insisted upon a fixed distribution for shop-floor employees were alluded to in Chapter Four. Recently the company has been able to introduce more flexibility into its pay policy. As the Personnel Director explained:

The Japanese are very mathematical and logical in their thought processes, so they said that if we had 100 people then one standard deviation of the people will be in the middle, i.e. 67% of the people will be OK, and on either side .... there will be some better than that and some worse than that .... But .... what happens if someone who is “good” becomes “very good”? .... I’ve been arguing with the Company Secretary for a couple of years, saying ‘I can’t argue about the *amount* of money, you know the financial situation, but you put the money on the table and let *me* spend it’. And last April he did exactly that, so what we did was pay a zero general increase and link pay to performance, and 25% of the people in the company got no pay rise, whereas others got as high as 5% and 7%.

New Bank has very recently implemented a new appraisal system called “valuing individual performance” (VIP), which involves members of staff and business unit managers jointly identifying key competencies for each job, and then deciding together on areas which can be developed over the subsequent twelve months. Appraisals are then conducted on a quarterly basis, and are directly linked to pay:

You need to have an appraisal system that is actually able to visibly measure what they do, and that can be based around a cashier having certain simple objectives.  
(Quality Service Co-ordinator)

This new appraisal system has been designed to tie in with the concept of a “balanced business score card”, which emphasises the four areas where the bank intends to be “first choice”: (i) customers; (ii) staff; (iii) shareholders; and (iv) internal procedures. Appraisal forms refer to these four areas, and staff need to be able to demonstrate how they are contributing to each one, and are scored accordingly under one of three categories (“exceeds”, “fully meets” and “under-performs”). Despite the intention of the new system to link the appraisal process more directly to the QM strategy, many managers at New Bank are highly critical of the way it has been introduced:

It was sort of thrown at management. We were given a manual and told ‘Right, that’s the appraisal system now, get on and do it’. We weren’t given any detailed guidance or training. (Lending Centre Manager)

There's been nothing put in place properly or advised to the staff properly about what the new system will actually permit them to do, how they can expect to progress, and how they can expect to be rewarded for good performance.  
(Customer Services Manager)

As at Auto Components, the pay of lower-grade employees at Hotel Co is not related to any formal appraisal system, although annual appraisals do take place. Employees are paid a salary for the job, and although a bonus has recently been introduced, this applies across-the-board, and so there remains no individual element to pay. In the words of the Quality Support Manager at head office:

The whole idea of recognition is something that we're looking at at the moment, and we're in the process of developing an appraisal system that is linked to the total quality programme, but I don't know any more about it than that.

Many managers in the hotels feel that such a development could not come quickly enough, and do not feel that the current situation is sustainable. One General Manager told me:

We have to find some better ways of getting more cash into people's back pockets, because I don't think this constant 'everyone's happy, everyone's motivated, everyone's empowered' can carry on forever unless it turns into something of real positive benefit to them, which has to be financial .... If TQM has all these benefits for the company, then we need to give some of those back or share them with employees.

#### 7.2.2 Employee Attitudes to Pay and Appraisal

Employees across the four companies were asked a number of questions about pay and appraisal. Firstly, they were asked if they thought their pay was in any way linked to their performance, and if so in what ways. By far the highest awareness of any link was among employees at New Bank, with 89% saying "yes", and 82.5% of these referring to

“appraisals”, and in particular the “VIP” scheme. Almost half of the sample at Office Tech (46%) said that their pay was linked to performance, the majority of these (69%) also referring to “appraisal”, and commenting that this is “linked to quality and absenteeism”. Not surprisingly, levels of awareness were far lower at the other two companies, with just a small number in the new shop at Auto Components mentioning the “higher rate for being multi-skilled”, a small number in the old shop saying that there is a “bonus if you work harder”, and a small number at Hotel Co referring to “assessment / appraisal” (Table 7.14).

Employees were then asked the extent to which pay is a motivation at work, and here the responses of those at Auto Components stand out, with 44% in the new shop and 40% in the old shop describing pay as motivating to a “very large extent”. The proportions saying this at the other three companies are far lower. Indeed, only 7% of employees at Hotel Co said that pay motivates to a “very large extent”, whilst 40% said that it does so “hardly at all”, as did 31% at Office Tech. On this issue, a number of employees at Auto Components made specific comments on their questionnaire returns about overtime pay, such as:

Basic pay is about average. But with overtime the pay can be pretty good. There is a lot of overtime worked here.

Most people are motivated by overtime. I’ve been here five years and there’s only been six weeks when I’ve had no overtime. I’ve been paid well over five years, but mainly due to overtime.

If pay is not considered to be a prime motivation by many employees, then what is? The largest proportions of employees at Office Tech, New Bank and Hotel Co (around 40% in each case) referred to a “sense of involvement” and “pride in the job”. In contrast,

although many from the new shop at Auto Components (40%) referred to “job satisfaction”, they made it clear that this was *less* of a motivation than pay. Moreover, 28% of employees in the new shop and 33% in the old shop actually said that “nothing else” acted as a motivation, something which virtually no one from any of the other companies said.

Finally on pay, employees were asked to rate how they thought their pay compared with other firms. At each company, the largest proportion opted to describe their pay as “about average”. Those in the old shop at Auto Components seemed the most satisfied with their pay, with 29% describing it as either “a bit better” or “a lot better than average”.

Turning to appraisal, employees were firstly asked what methods they thought were used to appraise their performance. The largest proportion of employees from the new shop at Auto Components (39%) said they were “not aware” of being appraised, or said they “did not know” how they were appraised; a further 22% said, quite correctly, that “only staff are appraised”. At the other three companies, most employees showed an awareness of the key appraisal methods: 74% at Office Tech mentioned “6 monthly assessments”, 67% at New Bank mentioned the “VIP” scheme, and 62% at Hotel Co referred to “annual appraisal” (Table 7.15).

As regards the extent to which employees feel satisfied with these methods, those at Hotel Co gave the most positive assessment, with 90.5% saying they were either “fairly” or “very satisfied”. Although around half said this at each of the other three companies, large proportions also said they were either “not very” or “not at all satisfied” (44% at

Auto Components, 50% at Office Tech, and 39% at New Bank). When these employees were asked why they were not satisfied with their appraisal, the response rate was unfortunately very low, but one thing was made clear; namely, that many employees at New Bank are highly critical of the way that the new “VIP” appraisal system operates. A number of them made comments to this effect, such as:

The manager said a lot of the reports he’d been given were too high (the marks we’d been given by our immediate bosses), and so he’s reduced them. So there is a cost limit. This defeats the object of the appraisal system .... I spent hours on the “VIP” form, and you end up putting down what you think they want to hear .... We are intelligent people and deserve to be treated as such.

The day-to-day customer who is satisfied with the service I provide is not taken into account [in the appraisal]. You have to be outstandingly good or bad to be noticed.

### **7.3 Discussion**

Chapters Five and Six considered in detail the issue of employee empowerment, examining the extent to which both team-based and more informal methods allow for an extension of autonomy and discretion for employees. There was much evidence to suggest that empowerment is genuine, albeit tightly constrained by management control systems. This chapter has examined some of these controls and constraints more closely, with two particular hypotheses being subjected to critical scrutiny.

The first of these is the central argument of the “exploitation” thesis, namely that any QM strategy necessarily leads to an intensification of work and to a corresponding increase in

pressure and stress for employees, and further, that these are strong enough to outweigh any of the perceived benefits obtained through the extension of discretion and autonomy.

We have certainly found evidence at each of the four case study organisations that there has been in different ways an intensification of work. Most strikingly, a clear majority of employees at each company said that they were now working harder than three years ago. A large number saw this as being caused by an increase in production or in the amount of work they are required to do, whilst a number of others (particularly at New Bank) said that there had been a decrease in staffing levels such that there were now fewer people doing more work. At the two manufacturing companies many employees feel that management expect too much from them. Others pointed to the nature of the technology on the production line, which not only dictates the pace at which they can work, but which also allows management to vary the pace according to production requirements. Managers claim that such technology is not intended to be oppressive, but it is almost bound to be experienced as such by employees.

Most employees, then, are working harder. But in what sense can their work be said to have become more “intense”? One possible way of discerning this is provided by a particular question which presented employees with a choice. If they felt they were working harder, then was this because a bigger part of their typical working day was now spent working, or was it rather that the intensity of each minute of their work had actually increased? By far the largest proportion at each company chose to say the latter, which is clear evidence of an intensification of work. This was particularly so in the case of New



Bank, with many employees making comments on their questionnaire returns to this effect.

However, although on face value these findings appear to lend considerable support to the intensification thesis, a number of important qualifications need to be made. The first of these concerns the differing responses between employees from the new and the old factories at Auto Components. If what the intensification thesis suggests about the impact of QM strategies is true, then we would expect to find those employees who have been trained to work in functionally flexible teams and with the latest manufacturing technologies to be more likely to report work intensification than those who have not been subject to these key elements of the quality improvement process. In fact, the opposite is the case. Although a number of employees from the new shop said they were now working harder, most said that they were not. Moreover, far fewer employees from the new shop reported that the intensity with which each minute is worked had increased. This evidence clearly undermines the comfortable assumption of the exploitation theorists that all aspects of QM will necessarily lead to an increase in effort levels and to an intensification of work.

The vast majority of employees feel that it is necessary to work as hard as they do. Most of those at the two manufacturing companies referred to the need to meet production targets and deadlines, and technology was again seen as a key influence. Employees at New Bank referred more specifically to sales targets, with many commenting that the pressure to sell products, together with the closer measurement and monitoring of work, is creating high levels of stress, which in turn are leading to higher absenteeism and

thence to a lower quality of customer service. Interestingly, a number of employees at all four companies also said that they feel they have a large amount of personal discretion over how hard they work. This apparently contradictory view echoes the findings reported in Chapter Five, where many employees described themselves as working “in a team” and yet at the same time reported that as individuals they have a large degree of discretion over the way they carry out their work.

There is clearly a good deal of evidence that employees feel pressure and stress at work from a variety of different sources. One of the specific arguments of the exploitation thesis is that “peer pressure” will result from the requirement to work in multi-skilled teams. Once again the evidence here is mixed, with most employees from the new shop at Auto Components reporting that they in fact rarely feel pressure from their team-mates, although in general many employees across the four companies reported feeling a general pressure to go along with the majority. Others mentioned feeling under pressure to work faster, and of fearing criticism from within the team.

At this point, a second important qualification to the intensification thesis needs to be introduced. Although the picture emerging may be one of increasing effort levels and more demanding targets, it is equally apparent that many employees do not necessarily consider the implications of all this for themselves to be wholly negative. This is evident from the fact that when they were asked if they enjoyed working as hard as they do, the vast majority replied “yes”. Many at Auto Components said they preferred having to work hard because it made the working day appear to pass more quickly, whilst those at the two service sector companies were more likely to refer to wanting to work hard out of

a sense of pride and job satisfaction, or because they find hard work rewarding and challenging.

This is not to suggest, of course, that the implications of QM for employees are wholly positive either, but rather that there is likely to be a mixture of costs and benefits. Whilst employees may not necessarily resent having to work harder, there is clearly a downside too. Around two-thirds at Auto Components referred to the boredom and the monotony of their work. At Office Tech too, the same feelings result from the particularly routinised and structured nature of production line work. At New Bank and Hotel Co the nature of work tasks may to some extent be intrinsically more varied, although, as we discuss in a moment, there are increasing trends towards greater routinisation. The complexity of employee responses is perhaps best illustrated by the case of New Bank. On the one hand, New Bank employees would appear to be the most vehement critics of management strategy from across the four companies, with large numbers pointing to the fatigue and stress which high workloads and demanding targets bring. At the same time, however, they are also the most likely to say that they enjoy their work. Many referred to having pride in their work, and of striving to give good customer service, effectively in spite of - rather than because of - all of the changes taking place.

Another central contention of the intensification thesis is that QM strategies entail an increase in the monitoring and surveillance of work, which once again is considered to be pernicious in its effects on employees. The evidence here is again mixed, but it does lend some support to this view. A large proportion of employees at each company said that they were aware of monitoring and surveillance to a considerable extent (although around

one-third at each of the two manufacturing companies said they were not aware of it at all). Straightforward manager or supervisor “over the shoulder presence” was commonly reported, with many referring to this as “spying”. Almost half of the sample of employees at Office Tech felt that they were monitored through performance appraisals. Others at Office Tech referred to monitoring through customer feedback and reject reports. A large proportion at New Bank described how their work is monitored by means of productivity statistics, which many referred to as “work measurement” or “time and motion”. And at Hotel Co, a wide variety of QA checks were mentioned.

A clear majority at each company also felt that the level of this monitoring and surveillance had increased under the QM strategy. This view was particularly marked at New Bank, where there has been a steady move towards the more detailed measurement and timing of jobs, such that employees say that they now have to be able to account for every moment of the working day. And at the two manufacturing companies, many employees referred to the increased potential for “traceability” as a result of the requirement to book work onto computers, as well as increased monitoring through production targets. A note of caution is again required, however, in terms of assuming that such trends will necessarily be perceived as constraining by employees themselves. Those at Auto Components were in general less likely to say monitoring had increased, and those from the new shop were in fact more likely to say that it had *decreased*, with many making comments on their questionnaire returns about the relative freedom they feel from close supervision and “over the shoulder” monitoring. Of course, one might expect this direct form of monitoring to be less evident in the new shop, whilst other more subtle and ultimately more effective methods would be used in their place. This

may well be the case in the new shop at Auto Components, but it is important to recognise that from the perspective of employees, the lack of management and supervisor presence on the shop-floor is equated with a feeling of there being less monitoring taking place.

As well as entailing a variety of techniques for monitoring work, QM strategies tend also to involve the use of methods for measuring and assessing the quality of the product or service being provided. And these too can allow managers greater knowledge of, and control over, the performance of their staff. At Auto Components and Office Tech a whole range of product quality checks are used, from SPC and production measures to customer feedback and reject reports. New Bank makes attempts to measure the service being provided by its staff through both customer questionnaires and through so-called “mystery shoppers”. And Hotel Co employs a range of techniques for monitoring and assessing customer satisfaction. Managers tend to claim that these methods of “measuring quality” are motivated out of concerns for customer satisfaction, and are not intended primarily - or even at all - as an aid to the identification of individual employee performance. Once again, however, the reality is that this is often what happens. Take New Bank as an example. Here, managers will use data from customer questionnaires to inform staff on an individual basis of their performance and of the need to improve politeness and courtesy. Managers say that if staff are always giving of their best then they should have nothing to fear from such a process, but the use of “mystery shoppers” will clearly lead to increased pressure on employees, in this case perhaps all the more so than straightforward “over the shoulder” monitoring as employees have no knowledge of when this particular “quality measure” is being used.

It is perhaps even more questionable that attempts to measure quality should be used to assess employee performance when we consider that managers themselves often acknowledge such measures to be extremely problematic. Take, for example, the way in which the effectiveness of the QM programme at Hotel Co is monitored. A fairly crude measure of “levels of TQM activity” is used, and different managers will expend more or less energy in attempting to be seen to be engaged in such activity, thus leading to a misleading picture of the extent of genuine quality improvement practices. Or again, consider the use of customer questionnaires and surveys. Managers at New Bank as well as Hotel Co acknowledge that these tend to throw up an unduly negative impression of the service being provided, which when communicated to staff is more likely to lead to feelings of demoralisation rather than any sense of empowerment and continuous improvement.

A further area in which management control can be seen to have been strengthened across the four case study organisations is that of discipline. Employees were asked an initial question about whether they thought management had become more or less strict since the introduction of the QM strategy. Although a clear majority at Office Tech thought they were now more strict, employees at the other three companies were in general equally as likely to say they were now less strict, with by far the largest proportions choosing to say there had been “little or no change”. However, when asked about whether there had been any change over certain specific issues, by far the largest proportion at each company said management were now more strict, with “poor quality work” in particular being something which employees felt management were far less prepared to tolerate. Here again, then, we have evidence of management asserting control whilst

employees do not necessarily - at least in the first instance - view it in terms of a more oppressive management style. In other words, management across the four organisations appear to have been successful in giving the impression to employees that they are now in general no more strict than before QM was introduced (as the answers to the first general question suggests). It is only when employees are probed further on particular issues that the practical reality of tighter discipline is revealed.

The second hypothesis which the chapter has attempted to shed some light upon is that under QM, pay and appraisal systems will be more closely linked to quality improvement, and that this will imply a similar increase in stress and pressure for employees as that caused by the more direct work intensification methods discussed above.

The evidence presented here provides fairly weak support for this claim. To begin with, in two of the case study companies there is as yet no explicit link between an employees' pay and his or her contribution towards quality. Auto Components are coming to the end of a five-year pay deal, something which seems to have been considered as positive by management and employees alike, and the deal did not include any bonus element to reflect specific quality-related issues. And at Hotel Co, employees are paid a rate for the job, and there is here too no attempt to reward distinct quality improvement activities. Having said this, there does appear to be a growing feeling among managers at Hotel Co that such a link should be made.

A clear majority of employees at each of these two companies expressed satisfaction with the way their work is appraised, with those at Hotel Co being particularly supportive. It was interesting to see the ways in which employees think this appraisal is done. In the absence of a formal appraisal system for shop-floor employees at Auto Components, most of those in the new factory either said they didn't know how they were appraised or - quite correctly - that formal appraisal applies only to staff grades. A very small proportion considered their work to have been appraised via the examination which they took at the end of their multi-skilling training. At Hotel Co, most employees referred to the annual appraisal system, but it is notable that over one-third either said they didn't know how they were appraised or chose to mention other methods aside from the annual appraisal.

At Office Tech and New Bank, the link between appraisal and quality appears to be more explicitly made. At Office Tech, after a series of battles with the Japanese parent company over the imposition of a fixed distribution for pay, this has now been abandoned and pay rises are linked more directly to performance. Performance is reflected in the appraisal system, and this focuses in particular on two specific issues. One of these is absenteeism, and the other is "poor quality work". Senior management see these as essential requirements, and the appraisal system has been designed explicitly to privilege these above other issues. To this extent, then, there is an explicit link between quality and pay.

Employees at Office Tech are keenly aware of the importance of these two elements, but there is little evidence that they actually feel undue pressure as a result of them. Certainly



they consider management to be taking a stricter approach to “poor quality work” than previously, as already reported, but they give little indication of resenting this. Exactly half of the sample of employees at Office Tech said they were satisfied with the way they are appraised. It would appear that the greater measurement of their work and the clarity of the appraisal system is welcomed. Of the remaining half who had reservations, the most common complaint was that bonuses are based on a factory-wide basis and as such do not reward individual performance. None mentioned feeling under pressure as a direct consequence of the appraisal system.

At New Bank, a new appraisal system has been explicitly designed to do what the scheme at Office Tech apparently fails to do, which is - as the name of the scheme makes clear - “valuing individual performance”. This approach is based on the identification of competencies and the setting of personal targets between the employee and his or her manager, and quarterly appraisals are then directly linked to pay.

Employees at New Bank show a high level of awareness of the new scheme, and a majority express themselves to be satisfied with it. Most seem to support the principle behind the scheme, welcoming the intention to more closely identify individual performance, and once again no comments were made to the effect that employees feel pressured by this process. Many express dissatisfaction, however, with most complaining that the system has been badly implemented and that they are not sure how it is to work. Many are critical of the speed with which the appraisal system has been introduced, a complaint which - as we saw in Chapter Four - is also levelled at other key aspects of the

QM strategy at New Bank, and which leads invariably to resentment on the part of employees.

This chapter has considered some of the main ways in which it might be argued that management are able to consolidate or increase their control over employees through QM. The majority of the analysis has focused on the various ways in which QM may lead to an intensification of work and a consequent increase in pressure and stress for employees. Although a series of questions on effort levels, discipline and stress did indeed reveal an atmosphere of considerable pressure, most employees did not appear to resent this, and it would clearly be wrong to draw the simple conclusion that there had occurred an aggressive re-assertion of managerial control against the wishes of employees. Although the evidence presented concerning the use of appraisal systems to tie performance more closely to quality issues is less detailed, the same general conclusion is appropriate. Only two of the four companies (Office Tech and New Bank) are attempting to do this at all systematically, and in both cases employees generally report that they are satisfied with the way their work is appraised, and tend not to feel any greater pressure as a result of the closer analysis of their contribution towards quality.

What this chapter has highlighted, then, is the complexity of the relationship between commitment and control. There is much evidence that empowerment is genuine, but that at the same time the means of providing for it tend to increase the pressures upon employees. Equally, there is evidence that management have in each case consolidated their control in a variety of ways, but at the same time some of the consequences of this, far from being resented by employees, may actually be welcomed. What is needed

therefore, is an analysis which focuses on this essential balance in the operation of QM. Chapters Nine and Ten pull together the major themes from the thesis and addresses them in these terms, substantiating a theoretical position which allows for an explanation for the nature of the balance between commitment and control at each of the four case study organisations.

Before this, however, the next chapter briefly considers one other sense in which QM may allow for a re-assertion of managerial control; namely, through the marginalisation of collective structures of employee representation.

## CHAPTER EIGHT:

### MANAGEMENT CONTROL - REPRESENTATIVE STRUCTURES

In Chapter One the nature of the employee participation inherent in the philosophy of QM was defined as voluntary *direct* participation, which includes all those forms in which individual employees take part directly in decision-making or company processes. This can be contrasted with *indirect* participation, and the two can be seen as serving different functions within the organisation. Whilst the former aims to improve worker motivation and commitment (in this case commitment to QM), the latter aims principally to improve worker representation in decision-making processes, and commonly takes the form of trade union representation.

It is sometimes claimed that one implication of management's experimentation with direct forms of employee participation through QM is that indirect representation mechanisms may be marginalised and rendered less important. Where management successfully introduce direct participation, and where there is considerable employee involvement in new quality-related initiatives, then one certainly might expect employees to see less use or purpose for trade union representation. On the other hand, the introduction of QM may give rise to new grievances among employees, and as a result there may be little or no reduction in their commitment to trade unions.

The hypothesis briefly considered in this chapter is that it has been the explicit intention of the four case study companies to weaken and marginalise trade unions where they are

recognised, and to keep them out where they are not, and that this can be viewed as another area in which management has therefore been able to consolidate its control.

It has been apparent throughout this thesis that, in a heightened competitive environment, organisational restructuring in the direction of QM tends to be driven less by a desire to control and discipline labour *per se* than by - for example - the importance of customer satisfaction, quality control or delivery schedules. In other words, it is “strategic objectives” which are the principal stimuli to management decision-making and action in this area. However, it is clear that the outcomes of these strategic decisions have substantive implications for employees’ participation and involvement, and hence for their autonomy, power and organisation. As Wilkinson, Allen and Snape observe,

to the extent that it offers a form of employee involvement rooted firmly in the production process, aimed at meeting customer requirements, and guided by management, TQM could marginalise the union as a communications channel, at the same time strengthening the sense of commitment to what might be seen as “managerial” objectives (1991: 31).

Certainly as regards the introduction of aspects of “hard QM”, British union representatives have so far found it difficult to challenge managerial prerogative on questions of choice of new technology and team-based forms of work organisation. As for “soft QM”, although warning against predicting inevitable outcomes of HRM, and pointing to the differing responses of unions according to their organisational traditions, Martinez Lucio and Weston nevertheless conclude that

one of the evolving management strategies in replacing or developing a new industrial relations framework has been the integration of workers into a managerial led agenda that is closer to the “needs” of the product market. In many cases this has involved an attempt to redesign worker representation with or without the collaboration of the trade unions (1992: 218).

As regards the reactions of trade unions to this kind of management approach, Geary has observed that

unions, for their part, have been realistic enough to know the folly of over-using their diminishing power resources and have generally resigned themselves to accepting changes in work organisation: to resist would endanger peoples' employment and the survival of the enterprise (1994: 645).

This attitude has certainly been reflected in other case study research which has examined the reaction of unions to QM in financial services organisations:

At the Co-operative Bank .... [despite] a long tradition of trade unionism and very high levels of membership, the union was not centrally involved in the programme. It seems that the union saw TQM as concerned with the detailed management of the bank and that this was not an area for union involvement (Wilkinson, Allen and Snape, 1991: 31).

This chapter considers the role that trade unions have played in QM at the two companies where they are recognised (Auto Components and New Bank), and examines employee attitudes towards them; Auto Components recognises the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU) for collective bargaining purposes, whilst New Bank recognises two unions - the Banking, Insurance and Finance Union (BIFU) and a Staff Association. What has been the approach adopted by management towards the unions at these two organisations? Do employees feel that the introduction of QM has strengthened or undermined the unions? If it has led to the latter, is this felt to have been an explicit intention of management? And at the non-union firms (Office Tech and Hotel Co), do employees feel that QM has heightened or lessened the need for more collective forms of representation?

In considering these questions, the chapter follows a similar format to the discussion of pay and appraisal in the previous chapter. It begins with a description of the role of the unions at each company, and considers employee responses from across the four companies together, before a third section highlights the main analytical themes.

### **8.1 Representative Structures at Four Case Study Organisations**

Auto Components has a long history of trade union recognition, and currently operates with an effective closed shop. As the Union Convenor explained:

It's a 100% AUEW factory, and there's never been a problem with that .... People come here and we accept them. They are told it's union. They come here on their month or 3 month qualifying period, and then we approach them about joining the union. It's never been a problem.

The convenor has been at the company for many years, as have a number of the senior managers, and it would appear that an atmosphere of considerable mutual trust has been developed over this period. The convenor certainly has a very positive attitude towards new management practices, and clearly identifies his own role as one of a communications link between management and the shop-floor, assisting in the amelioration of employee grievances:

I make a point of walking around the site twice a day .... so that anybody who's got a problem can tell me, and I'll go and see about it .... Sometimes people don't want to go to management, and they say 'Well, what do I do'? .... Often I will have a word with the manager, I won't tell him names, and if he says 'No, that's a bit dodgy' then fair enough, but if he says 'Yeah, that's all right' then I go back and I tell them. And they still like it this way. Although they are quite free to talk to managers, there is sometimes a great reluctance to do it, so they come through me. But that's what I'm there for.

A number of the managers at Auto Components drew a contrast between the present situation and what they often referred to as “the old days”, in order to highlight the constructive nature of the current management/union relationship. For instance, the Manufacturing Manager recalled:

I can remember back in 1981/82 when we'd had this powerful shop stewards committee, and the foundry had to shut and about 300 people had to go, and virtually all the stewards and convenors left at that time, and when the new MD arrived there was still [the current convenor] down the bottom, and I did wonder at that time why we were keeping any shop stewards and why we didn't get rid of the union altogether. But I've come to the conclusion that it was probably one of the most astute moves we ever made, because you still had the unity of the union, and a convenor who has taken the new culture on board, and in some ways he almost takes on the role of a sort of personnel manager.

However, the convenor is not simply a management stooge, and having a union presence inside the factory has led to a number of benefits for shop-floor employees, things which the convenor believes would certainly not have been achieved without pressure at the local level. In his words:

Tell me the last time nationally we got anymore holidays. Tell me the last time nationally apprentices got a rise. We've got agreements where all our apprentices get rises. We've negotiated another two days extra holiday. The power of the union is within the plant .... This management accept the right to collective bargaining, in other words the right of the workforce to nominate and elect people to speak for them .... but I don't think they'd care if we were in the clockmakers union .... and if we were I think all the agreements would be exactly the same.

Although generally viewing the current role of the union as a constructive one, some managers at Auto Components did refer to the problems that can arise as a consequence of such agreements:

The union within our company still provide stumbling blocks and difficulties with regard to flexibility, working practices etc., which come from the internal written agreements that we've had over the years. Certain things happen which can only happen under certain conditions, and if those conditions weren't there we'd



probably be able to move a bit faster and be able to do things in a different way.  
(Training and Safety Officer)

In this sense, although the company may welcome the fact that the Union Convenor acts as an effective communications channel between management and the shop-floor, at the same time the union role is not seen as universally beneficial. Managers are aware that they have it within their capacity to de-recognise the union, and would apparently not hesitate to do so if they felt that the “stumbling blocks” were becoming too obstructive.

As the Training and Safety Officer put it:

Longer term, the question may be asked ‘Well, what does the trade union do for the company that a de-recognised situation wouldn’t?’ .... We are a manufacturing company that makes a profit and satisfies customers, and if we can do that with trade union involvement - OK. But if there is ever a question that we can’t, I think the answer will be quite clear.

The other case study company with trade union recognition is New Bank. Here, the two unions appear to have very little influence, either at local or national level. They have been largely ineffective in influencing the nature and course of the QM strategy. Few branch representatives are particularly committed to union matters, and if they are they are generally faced with an apathetic - or even sometimes hostile - response from other staff. Some of the managers at branch level assigned the weakness of the unions primarily to the apathy of staff, whilst also recognising the constraints of the economic context. In the words of one Branch Manager:

The trouble with bank staff is that they’re not militant people by nature, are they? .... Bank staff are apathetic to union matters .... I think the unions will play a bigger part in the future, and I think the way we’re going, there will be more affiliation to the unions. The bank has got the whip hand in the current climate but perhaps the situation will change.

Many of the more junior managerial staff are union members themselves, but they are also realistic about the barriers to effective union opposition to bank policy. One of them told me:

I have always been in a union here .... However, I think the unions are very weak .... What we need is one union, but we won't have much power until that happens. The union will do their best, but they are too weak to threaten the bank with anything. Each year we have the pay rise and each year we are balloted on whether we want to go out on strike. But what is the point of going out on strike? All you would have then would be a note on your record saying 'This woman went out on strike, she is a trouble maker, get rid of her at the earliest opportunity'. So nobody would do it, and the union has nothing they can threaten the bank with. (Assistant Services Manager)

Although this is a common sentiment among many of the younger junior managers, the more senior managers tend to take a less critical attitude to bank policy, putting faith in the bank's "right to manage" and consequently showing little respect for the fundamental rationale behind collective trade unionism. As one manager put it:

Personally I'm not in a union. I work for [New Bank]. That is how I look at it. I think [New Bank] calls the tune really, and if I don't like it I can go and look somewhere else. And if they say 'Right, we are going to impose this upon you', then who am I to object to it? I don't think [the unions] have got much power really. But then I suppose if everyone joined they would have wouldn't they?, and that is one of their arguments I suppose.

We could consider this summary of management attitudes to unions in terms of a "continuum of unitarism". Having begun with Auto Components at the one end, and then moved to New Bank, the unitarist sentiments become stronger as we move next to consider Office Tech. The company is non-union, and in general management see no need at all for union recognition, believing that sufficient mechanisms already exist for employees to voice their grievances:

Perhaps I'm an anti-union man, but I don't see a need for that in this company. The management is enlightened enough to look after the employees rights. If we'd

got [union recognition] we may have used it as part of our structure, but there is no point in introducing it. (Finance Manager)

We do have as open a policy as possible. And if people have a grievance, as far as I'm concerned all they have got to do is ask me to come and talk to them .... The facility is there. (Personnel Director)

When pressed, however, the Personnel Director made it clear that his preference for a non-union situation arises not simply because he believes sufficient means already exist for employee voice, but also because he believes that a union would act as a brake on managerial prerogative. He gave the following example:

What we did [last year] was pay a zero general increase and link pay to performance, and 25% of the people in the company got no pay rise .... You wouldn't be able to do that on a brownfield site because you'd have the trade unions in, but we have no trade unions. I got a lovely letter from the T&G saying 'I understand you've not given any pay rise', and that letter went straight in the bin.

At the other end of the continuum we find perhaps the strongest unitarist sentiments expressed at Hotel Co. Here, managers advance the same reasons for being opposed to union recognition as did their counterparts at Office Tech. Firstly, there is the "we are enlightened enough already" argument:

The day we have trade unions is the day we've failed as managers, because if the employees feel the need to have trade unions then we've really cocked it up somewhere along the line, because we work on the premise that if you want something then go and speak to your supervisor or head of dept, and they will look after you. We are a caring company. (General Manager)

And then there is also the "unions would just get in the way" argument:

There's a hotel down the road that is heavily unionised, and the General Manager has horrendous problems, because whereas I can pull somebody in and give them a little man to man talk, he can't. And I think sometimes you need to be able to talk to somebody quietly in the office and off the record, and if you can't do that I don't know how you'd survive. It would drive me berserk I think. (General Manager)

However, although some managers at Hotel Co may express strongly anti-union sentiments, most are certainly not opposed to there being mechanisms through which employees may air their grievances. On the contrary, employees are actively encouraged to consider quarterly meetings, quality circles, team briefings and other such fora as opportunities to put forward and discuss problems. Although impossible to confirm, as the question could not be included in the employee questionnaire, managers at Hotel Co tend to believe that employees themselves would not want the company to recognise a union. In the words of a Personnel and Training Manager:

I think the culture we've moved into means that people are free to voice their opinions without too much risk. They might not get the end result that they want, but they can at least voice their opinion without any repercussions .... We have tried to be very open and honest, and if you tell people the reasons why they will accept it to some degree, so I think we've benefited by not having a union to go through.

## **8.2 Employee Attitudes to Representative Structures**

The majority of questions about trade unions were addressed only to those at Auto Components and New Bank. A small number of questions on union recognition were included in the Office Tech questionnaire. As previously mentioned, however, senior managers at Hotel Co would not allow any questions on unions to be included.

All employees at Auto Components are members of the AEEU. Table 8.1 shows that just under half of the sample at New Bank (47%) are union members. Of these, just over half are BIFU members, whilst the remainder are in the Staff Association. Of those at New Bank who are not union members, many said they have not joined because they think the

unions are too weak, and that the bank is able to implement whatever changes it wants to regardless of the opinion of the unions; as such, they see little point in becoming union members.

When employees at both of these companies were asked if they thought the changes brought about as a result of the QM strategy had made the union stronger or weaker, a large majority said it had made no difference, whilst more said that the unions were now weaker as a result than said they were stronger (Table 8.2). As for the nature of this union weakness, a large proportion at both Auto Components (43%) and New Bank (60%) said that the unions were unable to effect changes in company strategy if the employer is determined to see changes introduced. Some of this group also said that the unions are undermined by new working practices.

However, as to whether the undermining of the union is a deliberate strategy on the part of the company, a very large proportion at both Auto Components (86%) and New Bank (70%) said that it is not. Many at Auto Components indicated that there is a good working relationship between management and the union, and that managers are happy with the role of the union to the extent of seeing it as a valuable asset. In contrast, the largest proportion at New Bank said that the unions were so weak that the bank had little need to try to undermine them further. One particular issue mentioned here was the fact that clerical staff are represented by two unions, which many felt undermined their oppositional strength. As one employee put it:

There is a staff association as well as a union, and because of the two I think the bank can divide and rule, or take no notice of either. If there was just one union I might have joined.

These differences of opinion about the role and influence of the unions between employees at Auto Components and New Bank are reflected more clearly in other questions. Table 8.3 shows as many as 40% of those at Auto Components describing the union as having had either a “fairly significant” or a “very significant” influence in determining the outcome of new working practices. The corresponding figure at New Bank is only 7%. Indeed, exactly one-third of employees at New Bank think the unions have had a “very insignificant role”, whilst the proportion saying this at Auto Components is only 4%. Employees at Auto Components consider the main influence of the union to have been its general involvement in company policy and its representation of members’ interests in discussions with management. Typical comments were:

It does what a union should do, looking after workers’ rights and not letting us be trampled on all the while.

Changes have been done in consultation with the union. They do more than they’re given credit for.

These findings are reinforced by Table 8.4. Firstly, employees at Auto Components consider the union to have been far more successful at representing their interests than do those at New Bank. And secondly, those at Auto Components are also more likely to say that the influence of the union is now higher than it was five years ago. Despite this, however, the majority of employees at both companies feel that the influence of the unions has either stayed about the same or decreased. Many of those who think it has decreased do so because they feel that “changes happen anyway”.

Although employees at Auto Components tend to rate the union as more influential than do those at New Bank, Table 8.5 shows that there are very marked differences between

these two groups of employees in terms of what they consider the sources of this influence to be. For instance, whilst virtually half of those at Auto Components (48%) describe the union convenor at the plant as having a “great deal of influence”, the proportion at New Bank assigning the same level of influence to branch or office union representatives is only 6.5%. Employees at New Bank tend instead to consider the national union as more important, with 74% describing it as having either “some influence” or a “great deal of influence”, compared with only 28% who said this at Auto Components.

It is worth noting, however, that although the full-time union convenor at Auto Components may be seen by many shop-floor employees as influential, he is not without his critics, and a number of comments were made to the effect that he is too close to management. For instance:

Our convenor is talking people into doing what the management want us to do, saying ‘It’s gonna happen anyway’, and ‘I’ve told the management you’re gonna do it’. You’ve got to read between the lines with the convenor.

Management are gonna try and make changes .... and then they’ll use the union to make us agree to it. This is common knowledge around the shop-floor.

The union seems to be involved with the management a lot more. Some of the union people are the best managers the company has ever had!

Table 8.6 also highlights some interesting findings. At Auto Components the union is considered to be best at representing employees’ interests over pay by the largest proportion of employees, whilst management is considered to be far more capable of doing so over issues such as overtime, re-deployment between jobs and the way work is organised. Employees at Auto Components go on to rate not the union or management

but themselves as the best protector of their interests as regards the pace and intensity of work. The pattern of responses is similar at New Bank, although slightly less weight is given to the ability of the union to represent employees' interests over pay.

Moving now to Office Tech, employees there were firstly asked if they thought it would be beneficial if the company recognised a trade union. Almost three quarters (72%) said that it would not (Table 8.7). The majority of these said that they thought the company operated perfectly well without a union, and that union recognition was therefore unnecessary. Typical comments were:

I do not understand a great deal about trade unions. However, we seem to operate successfully without one.

This company has a highly efficient procedure for dealing with problems as they occur, and resolving them with speed and efficiency.

In light of these views, it is not surprising that 68% of employees at Office Tech said they would not join a union if one were to be recognised by the company. Once again, most said that it would not be necessary because there already existed a good working relationship between management and employees.

### **8.3 Discussion**

The hypothesis examined in this chapter relates to the role of trade unions in QM. It is often assumed that the introduction of QM will allow for an increase in managerial control through the marginalisation of unions, thus weakening a key avenue for potential resistance to management policy. The use of new forms of communication and



involvement may undermine the union as a communications channel, and the increasing stress on the individual employee which QM implies may pose a serious challenge to the collectivist ethos upon which unions rely. The evidence presented here, however, provides scant support for this scenario.

Let us firstly consider Auto Components. The company is well advanced in its QM strategy, and yet far from this having led to the undermining of the trade union, the company still operates with an effective closed shop. The company has a history of adversarial industrial relations, but there now appears to be a constructive and open dialogue between stewards and management, and the full-time union convenor is kept informed on a regular basis of any changes that will impact upon employees. For their part, employees clearly see the convenor as influential, and there is a strong union identity on the shop-floor.

A large part of the explanation for this situation lies in the history of the company. The full-time convenor and many of the senior managers have been together for a long period. They have in a very real sense been through the “bad times” together, and a mutual trust has been established over many years. Management are aware that the convenor is sympathetic to the direction of change, and they have therefore chosen not to challenge his role but instead to take advantage of his potential as a communications link with the shop-floor, helping to smooth the introduction of new practices.

In this sense, it could be argued that the influence of the union at Auto Components has indeed been undermined. Certainly a number of employees commented that they thought

the convenor was too close to management, and had little genuine oppositional influence. The union may still be recognised, but it would appear to be tolerated only as long as it poses no threat to the introduction of management policies. Should this be the case, management see de-recognition as a definite option.

Whilst the strategy of management at Auto Components might thus be seen as one of “using” the union, the strategy at New Bank is best described as one of “non-engagement” with the unions. The unions appear weak and divided, and their lack of influence is compounded by the apathy of staff. There is very little union influence at workplace level. Employees tend to see the national level as more important, although they have had little central involvement in the implementation of QM. At New Bank, then, management are clearly “in control”. Since the unions are too weak to offer any resistance to new working practices, management would appear to have no need to attempt any form of constructive engagement with them.

Most employees at Auto Components and New Bank feel that the unions are now weaker than before the QM strategy was introduced. Few, however, believe this to have been a direct consequence of QM, and only a small proportion thought that management were deliberately attempting to marginalise the unions. Rather, there is a widespread view that in the current economic climate the unions do not have the power to influence corporate strategy if management are determined to push changes through.

As regards the two case study companies which do not recognise trade unions, one of them has a clear policy of “union avoidance”. Management at Office Tech see no need at

all to recognise a union, and always ignore union advances. For their part, most employees elicit anti-union sentiments and say they would not join a union even if one were recognised for collective bargaining purposes. Office Tech is a young company with a young workforce, and unlike Auto Components has no history of union involvement. Many employees feel happy with existing procedures for dispute resolution, and managers believe they are themselves sufficiently enlightened that the oppositional role a union might play is not necessary.

Managers at Hotel Co tend to offer an even stronger unitarist analysis. They too see no need for a union, and argue that union recognition would act as a destructive constraint upon their legitimate freedom to manage. Despite this more hard-line approach - reflected, perhaps, in the fact that no permission was given to ask employees directly about their views on unions - Hotel Co nevertheless appears to have adopted a more subtle approach than Office Tech. Rather than avoiding the issue of collective representation altogether, the strategy at Hotel Co is perhaps best categorised as one of union “substitution”, whereby other “softer” representative forms have been more fully developed and resourced. These provide for a sense of greater openness and encourage employees to feel they have the ability to question managerial prerogative, whilst at the same time dampening the likelihood of union sentiments arising.

In terms of the role of trade unions in QM, management can at each of the four case study organisations be said to successfully control the extent of union influence. However, where unions are recognised there is scant evidence of them being undermined through the adoption of an aggressive anti-union stance. Rather, at the company where employees

retain the highest commitment to trade unionism (Auto Components), the involvement of the union appears to contribute positively to the aims of QM. I have described at length in Chapter Four how employee commitment to QM is strongest at Auto Components and at Hotel Co. And it is notable that Hotel Co is the other company where, although unions are not recognised and are not likely to be, other representative structures provide something of an alternative to unionisation, and the company remains committed to an image of shared interests between employees and management. It is certainly feasible for managements to by-pass unions, especially where they are already weak (as at New Bank), but it would appear that this policy may in fact make employee acceptance of quality more difficult to attain.

This chapter has once again highlighted the complexity of issues of management control. Chapter Seven documented numerous ways in which the consolidation of management control goes together with an intensification of work, and yet the analysis also showed that such techniques are not simply resisted by employees, and may often be seen as positive. Similarly here, we have seen that where trade unions are recognised, management are certainly able to control the role and influence that the unions play in the introduction and operation of QM. At the same time, however, the picture is not simply one of “macho-management” and aggressive anti-unionism against the wishes of employees. Rather, the potential exists in some cases for the company and the union to be engaged in a constructive dialogue which is seen as beneficial by both management and employees alike.

The final two chapters of the thesis expand upon the developing analysis of control and commitment at each of the case study organisations. Chapter Nine uses further new data as a means of illustrating two important conceptual dimensions to the explanation of differing levels of employee commitment to QM; namely, the importance of internal process and external context. Following this, Chapter Ten incorporates these themes into a wider discussion which locates the main findings of the thesis within the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter One.

## CHAPTER NINE:

### EXPLAINING ORGANISATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Chapters Four to Eight have presented a detailed analysis of a broad range of issues. What has come through consistently in the discussion of these issues is the complexity of the relationship between management control and employee commitment, and the fact that at each case study organisation QM has led to a complex mixture of costs and benefits for employees. What has also been apparent is that this mixture of positive and negative aspects takes different forms in the different organisational settings, due to the particular configuration of factors at work in each case. The final two chapters of the thesis examine these factors in more depth, thus allowing some suggestions to be made as to what some of the necessary conditions might be for QM to be successful.

The success of managerial attempts to generate positive employee reactions to quality-related initiatives would appear to rely essentially on two dimensions; namely, the internal *process* and the external *context*. This chapter considers one illustrative example of each of these dimensions, before Chapter Ten puts these into a wider context, bringing together all of the key findings from the thesis and locating them within the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter One.

The importance of process is highlighted through a consideration of training at each of the four organisations. Employee attitudes to training are examined, in terms of how adequate they consider training to be, and more importantly whether they consider it to be

related to key aspects of QM - such as continuous improvement and employee empowerment - or instead as related to more narrow job-specific issues. To the extent that management rhetoric does explicitly link training to the notion of empowerment, there is an issue around the degree to which this is reflected in practice. Where it is not, mistrust on the part of employees is likely to quickly ensue. Training is an example of process in the sense that it is an issue over which management have a degree of strategic choice; and the analysis presented here shows clearly that the nature and extent of management commitment to it can have a direct influence on levels of employee commitment.

The second section of the chapter highlights the importance of context through a consideration of the climate of job security at each company. In the same vein as previous chapters, the focus is once again on employees' own perceptions. The analysis suggests strongly that a perception of relatively high job security may also be a necessary condition for employee commitment to QM.

## **9.1 The Importance of Process: Training Policy**

### **9.1.1 Auto Components**

The QM programme at Auto Components has involved the company in making a heavy investment in training for those in the new shop. Employees are sent on team-building exercises outside of the factory, and on specialist manufacturing technology courses. And at the end of a two-year training period, each multi-skilled worker takes a "skills test", a

practical on-the-job assessment, and has a final interview with the Production Manager and the Personnel Manager. This is part of the move towards more formal assessment of employees' competencies, and after successful completion of the training each employee is issued with a "multi-skill certificate". Managers believe it is necessary to give this form of recognition, because otherwise there is a tendency for employees who have been developing a teamworking approach to feel that they have not been receiving "real" training. In the words of the Production Manager:

The function of working in the team is the most difficult to get, and people don't realise when they have got it either, if they haven't got the bit of paper. So we now give a certificate at the end of the line, and that gives a sense of achievement.

The far greater emphasis that management have put on training in the new shop comes through clearly in Table 9.1. Firstly, whilst all employees in the new shop said they received training, it is notable that as many as 24% in the old shop said that they did not. And when those who said they did receive training were asked to estimate how much training they have per-year, around half in the new shop said "over one month", whilst almost half of those in the old shop replied only "a few days". Moreover, most of the training in the old shop is merely "on-the-job", whilst all of those in the new shop said that they also received "off-the-job" training.

When provided with a list of possible reasons for training and asked to say which they considered related to the training they receive, all of those in the new shop selected all seven categories (Table 9.2), whilst the most popular response from those in the old shop was that training was in order to "work with new technology or equipment in the job".



Table 9.3 shows the mixed responses when employees were asked to indicate what they considered the most important of these aspects to be.

Perhaps more illuminating than these questions were those which asked employees about the adequacy of the training they receive, and where they consider the weaknesses to be. Here, it is striking that only 8% of those in the new shop chose to describe the training they receive as “more than adequate”, which is by far the lowest proportion to do so from across the four companies. And as many as 52% described training as either “barely adequate” or “not at all adequate”. By contrast, only 5% of those in the old shop were equally damning, with the largest proportion (68%) opting to describe the training they receive as “adequate but nothing more”.

The reason for this very critical view of training provision from those in the new shop becomes clear when we look at Table 9.3. Here, we find by far the largest proportion (56.5%) saying that training gets sidelined because “production targets always come first”. The same view was not nearly as prevalent among those in the old shop. Rather, of those who were critical of training here, the largest proportions either said that there was “not enough depth” to training and that it was “too idealistic” (42%), or they said that there was simply “not enough time” spent on it. This latter point was far less of a concern to those in the new shop, who went on to acknowledge unambiguously that their training provision had increased markedly since the QM strategy was introduced. The very critical view of training among employees in the new shop was reflected strongly in many of the comments made on their questionnaire returns, such as:

[There was] great stress at my original interview that there would be adequate training. I was assured there would be. But in reality .... there is not very much training. You are expected to pick it up as you go along. The company loses by not allocating time for training. The general trend is to forget the training and concentrate on production.

Getting parts out the door is seen as more important than training, and this gets in the way of commitment to training.

It's all production here, and they don't want you to switch the machines off and take time out for training, which is a false economy in the end, but I'm not a manager.

Management tell customers what great training there is all the time, when really we're doing it all off our own backs.

Quite clearly, the investment that Auto Components has made in training is not reflected in commitment on the part of employees. Managers may say that they are serious about training, but for the vast majority of employees, especially in the new shop, the reality is somewhat different.

#### 9.1.2 Office Tech

Office Tech has not made as heavy an investment in training shop-floor employees as Auto Components. Instead, the company concentrates on basic on-the-job training, and puts great stress on the need to maintain consistency in the quality of the product. There is less emphasis on training employees to be pro-active in terms of quality improvement. Besides, this tends to be seen as the responsibility of the quality assurance department, and not something that shop-floor operatives can easily be trained to do. As the Purchasing and Logistics Manager explained:

We have trained a lot of people - mainly leading hands but some direct operators as well - in the "seven tools of quality control", to help them solve problems. But

you can't go into it too deeply because they wouldn't understand it. And this is run by the QA department.

All employees at Office Tech said that they received training, although the amounts reportedly received varied widely (Table 9.1). Overall, around half of the sample said that the level of training they receive had "increased" since the QM programme was introduced. Two-thirds said that the training was both on- and off-the-job, although virtually all others (28%) said that training was on-the-job only.

When asked to select what they considered to be the most important reason for the training (Table 9.2), the most popular answers were "to work with new methods, systems or procedures", and "to add further skills to the basic job" (72% in each case). It is striking how relatively few indicated that training had anything to do with "developing team spirit" (only 20.5%). And again, when asked to indicate the most important reason for the training, only 6% selected "developing team spirit", with the largest proportion (exactly one-third) selecting "to achieve higher quality standards in the job" (Table 9.3).

Employees at Office Tech are not nearly as critical of the training they receive as those in the new shop at Auto Components. Rather, their views reflect more closely those in the old shop; that is, one-third described the training as "more than adequate", whilst the largest proportion (in this case 59%) described it as "adequate but nothing more". Of those who were more critical, one of the main complaints related to the trainers themselves being seen as "not skilled enough" or "too busy to help". In the words of one employee:

Most of the training is actually carried out when you do the process on the production line. The weaknesses are with the poor "process sheets" and with the

people who carry out the training, because they only learn the job off pieces of paper, not from the actual product.

In summary, employees at Office Tech appear to be more satisfied with the training they receive than do their counterparts at Auto Components. The training programme may be less ambitious, but at least it would appear to meet its more limited objectives.

### 9.1.3 New Bank

Training at New Bank is centred around equipping employees with the skills considered necessary to improve the level of customer service. Branches have regular “training days”, and longer courses are held at a national training centre. Much emphasis is placed on examining ways of finding sales opportunities, and employees also receive regular training on new technology. The overall training provision is explicitly presented as part of the bank’s “vision”.

Virtually all employees at New Bank said that they receive training, with the amounts reported varying fairly widely. In common with those at Office Tech, most said that this training was both on- and off-the-job (Table 9.1). The responses in Table 9.2 are again illuminating. A very high proportion of employees at New Bank indicated that training was in order to “add further skills to the basic job” (85%), whereas only a relatively small proportion (32%) said that it was to do with “developing team spirit”. In Table 9.3 too, it is clear that the most important perceived reason for training among New Bank employees is “adding further skills”.

New Bank employees' opinion of the training they receive is close to that expressed by those at Office Tech and at the old factory at Auto Components. That is, the largest proportion (in this case 55%) rate it as "adequate but nothing more", with a smaller proportion (25.5%) rating it as "more than adequate". Most of the criticisms relate to the training being seen as either "not frequent enough" (35.5%) or as "too basic and idealistic" (26%), as reflected in the following comments:

A certain idealism pervades "outside" training courses, which does not reflect the actuality of branch life.

Training appears to be given to support statistics rather than need, i.e. [so management can say that] x amount of staff will have seen this video, or x amount of training has been done within a given period.

Unfortunately, monitoring of the benefits of .... training is non-existent, and staff have little time to practice what they have learned due to every-day working pressures.

A further challenge to the adequacy of training at New Bank is also evident from Table 9.3. Although 41% of employees say that their level of training has increased under the QM programme, an almost equally large proportion (34%) report that it has in fact decreased, and this is by some considerable margin the largest proportion of employees to report a decrease from across the four companies.

In summary, although training is seen as generally adequate by most New Bank employees, many are disparaging about the amount of training, and about its lack of relevance to the reality of their actual jobs.

#### 9.1.4 Hotel Co

At Hotel Co, training on quality issues is an integral part of the TQM programme. The larger hotels run thirteen-week modular induction programmes for all new employees, covering the philosophy of TQM and instilling in employees from the very beginning the importance of customer service. In the words of an Assistant General Manager:

When people start with the company they all go through module TQM training, so that they are all aware of what quality is. It's drummed into them that this is something we are committed to, and that quality is a major issue within the company.

Following this, regular training days are held in all hotels, with sessions targeted around particular principles of QM such as employee empowerment or continuous improvement.

The attitudes of Hotel Co employees towards training are clearly the most positive from across the four companies. Virtually all of them say that they receive training, and an even higher proportion than from the new factory at Auto Components (50%) say that they receive "over one month" of training each year. In common with those at Office Tech and New Bank, a clear majority from Hotel Co (74%) say that this training is both on- and off-the-job (Table 9.1).

As for the perceived reasons for the training (Table 9.2), "adding further skills to the basic job" is again indicated by a large proportion (in this case 80%). However, it is notable that a significant proportion at Hotel Co (64%) also selected "developing team spirit" as one of the reasons (as compared with only 20.5% and 32% at Office Tech and New Bank respectively). Moreover, aside from the somewhat exaggerated responses of

those from the new shop at Auto Components, the highest proportion to select a particular reason from across all the companies was the 93% at Hotel Co who said that their training was in order to “achieve higher quality standards in the job”. This was also rated as by far the most important single reason for training by Hotel Co employees (Table 9.3).

Hotel Co employees appear to be markedly less critical of the training they receive than those at the other companies. For instance, as many as 65% declared training to be “more than adequate” (just about twice as many as the next highest proportion to do so, at Office Tech). Of the relatively smaller number to point to weaknesses, over half said that there was “not enough depth” to the training. Overall, however, around two-thirds (63%) reported the amount of training they have received since the QM strategy was introduced to have increased (Table 9.3).

In general, then, Hotel Co employees have a high opinion of the training they receive, and appear to appreciate the more targeted format that it takes.

#### 9.1.5 Conclusion

We saw in Chapter Six that employees at Hotel Co, rather than having a strong preference one way or the other, tended to believe they could have an influence over problem-solving and quality improvement equally well through both team-based and individual forms of involvement. The analysis here suggests that one possible explanation for this positive view of both group *and* individual involvement could be found in the nature of training at the company. That is, management’s attention and commitment to training as a

key element of the process of introducing and sustaining QM would appear to be reflected in widespread employee commitment, in particular to the principle of “employee empowerment”.

Levels of employee commitment are generally high at Auto Components, but the analysis here suggests this has little to do with training. Despite their clear recognition of the amount of training having increased markedly since the QM strategy was first introduced, most of those in the new shop clearly feel that it is inadequate. The main criticism was that production requirements too often meant that training got sidelined. So, despite the high ideals which management communicated about the reason for the training, employees could see in reality the lack of management commitment to it. The amount of training may have increased, but it would appear that employees would value it more if it were more consistently delivered and if the companies’ espoused commitment to it were reflected in practice.

It would seem, then, that in saying that there will be an emphasis on training, management at Auto Components may have raised the expectations of those in the new shop, and then when those expectations are not met, resentment sets in. Interestingly, managers at Office Tech have far more limited espoused training ideals, and see it as related merely to basic on-the-job issues, but at the same time employees appear to be far more satisfied. This is not to say that Office Tech employees were not critical of the training (many questioned the competence and commitment of the trainers themselves), but they know what the training is for, they see it being delivered as described, and they consequently have less cause for complaint.



A significant proportion of employees at New Bank were also critical of training provision for being too idealistic and a management fad, and many actually reported that their “real” training had decreased. Training seems to be most genuinely connected to key aspects of QM at Hotel Co. Across the four companies, most employees perceived the main reason for training as to be adding further skills to their basic job. But at Hotel Co, “developing team spirit” was seen as a key reason for training, and perhaps more significantly, virtually all employees at Hotel Co selected “achieving higher quality standards” as one of the reasons for the training. It would appear that Hotel Co delivers on its training promises far more than Auto Components. Training begins with a lengthy induction programme for all staff, and the scope and limits of empowerment are spelled out clearly to each employee in a practical way. The inference must be that employees prefer straightforward targeted training, rather than training which is either felt to be too idealistic and have little or no relevance to the reality of every-day work (as at New Bank), or is sidelined when production needs take over (as at Auto Components).

## **9.2 The Importance of Context: Job Security**

Having indicated the importance of internal *process* to the generation of employee commitment, this section briefly introduces more new data in order to highlight one crucial example of the importance of external *context*; namely, job security, or - more accurately - employees’ own perceived levels of job security.

The connections between job security and employee commitment to QM are immediately apparent from the data. For instance, Table 9.4 shows perceived levels of job security to

be by far the lowest among employees at New Bank (with 74% choosing to describe their level of job security as either “moderate”, “low” or “very low”), and we have seen many examples throughout the thesis of the parlous state of employee commitment to the “vision” which constitutes the company’s quality strategy. By contrast, levels of perceived job security are much higher at Auto Components and Hotel Co, the two organisations who have been shown consistently to be the most successful in generating the enthusiasm and commitment of employees to quality objectives.

In a parallel study by Collinson, Rees and Edwards (1996), it was evident across the six organisations studied that those employees who felt that their job security was highest were the most likely to favour quality initiatives. Although this would seem to be supported by the responses of employees at New Bank, Auto Components and Hotel Co, it is less clear that it applies in the case of Office Tech. Indeed, although in many respects employee commitment appears to be fairly low among Office Tech employees, Table 9.4 shows that they are in fact the most likely to say that they feel they have a “very high” level of job security (45% choosing to give this response). However, if we examine Table 9.5 it becomes apparent that this is attributable almost entirely to the policy of “no compulsory redundancies” at Office Tech. Indeed, whilst 29% of those at Auto Components and 32% at Hotel Co relate a perception of high job security to “confidence in management” or to the opinion that “the company is successful”, only 6% do so at Office Tech, whilst even fewer (2%) make this link at New Bank. At both Auto Components and Hotel Co, then, employee perceptions of relatively high job security go together with trust in management and a positive attitude towards management strategy. At New Bank, by contrast, job security is perceived to be low and there is little faith

expressed in management strategy. And at Office Tech, a “no compulsory redundancies” policy ensures that perceptions of job security remain high, and yet the evidence suggests that this is not sufficient in itself to lead to a particularly high degree of employee commitment to management strategy more generally.

Although the discussion so far suggests a link between perceptions of job security and commitment to QM, it remains inconclusive. Table 9.6 shows the results of some further statistical analyses which attempted to probe the connection somewhat further. Employee responses to a number of questions which may be taken as indicators of commitment to management strategy were correlated with perceived levels of job security. The number of respondents in each individual company is too small for meaningful correlations to be obtained, but if the total sample of employees is used then some significant results emerge. Taking the four organisations together there is, for instance, a positive correlation between perceived job security and employees’ opinion of the importance of quality, as well as their perceived level of influence over quality. In other words, the higher job security is considered to be, the more likely employees will be to report a high level of influence over quality. Other correlations are somewhat stronger. The higher job security is perceived to be, the more satisfied employees say they are with appraisal and with training provision, the more likely they are to have supported the QM strategy when it was first introduced, and the more likely they are to say they are supportive of further changes now. Most notably, those employees who perceive their job security to be high are far more likely to feel loyalty towards the organisation than those who do not.

Although unfortunately not included in the Office Tech questionnaire, a further question was asked of employees at the other three organisations about their general level of job satisfaction. The results are what we might expect in light of all the other evidence presented in the thesis (Table 9.7). A large proportion of employees at Auto Components expressed themselves to be “more satisfied”, especially in the new factory where 79% gave this response. They are followed closely by employees at Hotel Co, 58.5% of whom said they are “more satisfied”, whilst lagging some way behind are employees at New Bank, the largest proportion of whom (48%) said they have become “less satisfied” since the QM strategy was introduced. What is interesting is that if all these responses are cross-tabulated with perceived levels of job security, a clear pattern emerges (Table 9.8). Those who consider their job security to be “very high” or “high” are far more likely to report feeling “more satisfied” with their jobs, whilst in contrast a majority of those who consider themselves to have only a “moderate”, “low” or “very low” level of job security say they are now “less satisfied”.

### 9.3 Discussion

The first section of this chapter examined training provision at each case study organisation. Training policy is an issue over which managements have a degree of strategic choice, and it is one of the key elements in the operational *process* of QM. Where management pay insufficient attention to it (as at Auto Components and New Bank) it is likely to play little part in contributing to feelings of commitment. But, as we have seen, where there is greater attention given to relating training to specific QM

issues, and where these promises are followed through in practice (as at Hotel Co), then employee commitment may as a result be significantly enhanced.

The example of training illustrates well the importance of internal process. But clearly the success of generating employee commitment to QM is also dependent upon the external *context* in which organisations operate. And the example chosen here for illustrative purposes is the issue of job security, and in particular employees' perceptions of their own levels of job security. The second section of the chapter has shown clearly that where these are high (as at Auto Components and Hotel Co) then general levels of understanding and appreciation of QM, as well as wider feelings of job satisfaction, will tend to be enhanced; as such, a climate of relative job security would appear to be a further necessary condition for employee commitment to QM.

The final chapter of the thesis incorporates these findings into a broader summary of the key themes emerging from the study.

## CHAPTER TEN:

### CONCLUSIONS

The previous chapter began to analyse some of the factors which explain the differential levels of employee commitment to QM between the four case study organisations. In this final chapter, this assessment of the contingent elements of QM is expanded and located within the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter One.

As well as the focus on “contingency theory” as a means of isolating the determinants of *different* outcomes, Chapter One described the other major theoretical tenet of the study to be the use of the “re-organisation of control” thesis as a means of explaining what is fundamentally *common* across the four cases; namely, the fact that QM tends to give rise to a mixture of both positive and negative implications for employees. As also outlined in Chapter One, the positive aspects are stressed in the “optimistic model” of QM, which sees quality programmes as leading to enhanced employee commitment and greater job satisfaction through widening autonomy and discretion. In contrast, the “exploitation model” of QM stresses the negative aspects, arguing that empowerment is merely a rhetorical smokescreen to hide a reality of harder work and increasing stress.

Before examining the differences between the four case study organisations in more depth, this chapter begins by considering the evidence from the study in terms of these two models, presenting a balance sheet of the positive and negative aspects of QM as perceived by employees themselves.

## 10.1 Employee Commitment to Quality

We have seen much evidence to support the contention that QM strategies are received enthusiastically by employees. Across the four companies, employees certainly show a high degree of awareness of the principles of “quality improvement” and “customer satisfaction”. Most of those at Hotel Co and New Bank tend to define quality largely in terms of customer satisfaction and improving customer service, whilst perhaps unsurprisingly it is product quality which figures highest in the minds of employees at Auto Components and Office Tech.

Chapter Four examined the ways in which management have attempted to communicate the QM strategy to employees, and an assessment was made of the degree of employee commitment to the ideology of QM. Employees at Auto Components and Hotel Co showed consistently the highest levels of support for the changes which have taken place. They both showed the highest levels of support for the QM strategy when it was first introduced, and have also increased their levels of support more than those at the other two companies. A considerable amount of trust in management and loyalty towards management was also apparent. Once again, the most positive responses came from those at Auto Components and Hotel Co.

Employee involvement through teamworking was also found to be widespread. Two different forms of teamworking (task-based and problem-solving) were discussed in Chapter Five, and all four companies have been found to use each one to varying degrees. Just as Auto Components and Hotel Co are the two companies whose employees showed

the most awareness of the quality programme and the greatest commitment to it, so they are also the two case study organisations who have introduced the greatest degree of task-based teamworking. As regards problem-solving teamworking through quality circle-type groups, all four case study companies have used these in one guise or another as a more or less central aspect of their QM strategy, and employees have also demonstrated a high level of awareness of problem-solving groups where they have been well established. At Auto Components, for instance, levels of awareness of “COI groups” are very high, especially among those employees working in the new factory, and the level of attendance at group meetings is very high. Quality circles have also been a central feature of the QM strategy at Hotel Co, and the vast majority of employees consider them in a positive light in terms of the opportunity they provide for discussing problems and being kept informed of developments.

In Chapter Six the concept of “empowerment” was explored in greater detail, through an examination of the more informal ways in which employees are encouraged to put their views forward and influence the quality improvement process. Large numbers reported that they frequently put forward informal suggestions for improvements which are then acted upon by management. Many felt that their general level of involvement in problem-solving had gone up, and general levels of influence over quality were also perceived to be high among most employees.



## 10.2 Management Control and the Intensification of Work

As a counter to this evidence of increased employee discretion and autonomy, it has also been apparent throughout the analysis that these developments have their limits. Indeed, one of the key overall findings is that managers at all four companies are increasingly controlling or limiting the extent of employee empowerment. As discussed in Chapter Six, the concept of “empowerment” may in fact be too strong a word to describe the limited forms of employee involvement which have occurred as a result of QM. To say that employees have been “empowered” implies a fundamental shift in the “balance of power” between themselves and management. But we have seen that what is ceded to employees through QM tends only to be a limited form of *detailed* control, whilst *general* control remains firmly in the hands of management.

Consider, for example, problem-solving teamworking, where the clear trend is towards greater management intervention to ensure that teams meet only when necessary and that they address themselves to pre-defined “business objectives”. Or consider task-based teamworking, where there is scant evidence of the existence of autonomous work groups with discretion to decide who does what within the team. Rather, the discretion of teams is in fact limited to a fairly narrow range of job-specific tasks whilst responsibility for key decisions remains at higher supervisory or managerial levels. Indeed, although large numbers of employees say that they work in a team, they consistently report that decisions are either made above the level of the team, or else by themselves as individuals without reference to the view of the group as a whole.

Another area in which management can be seen to have consolidated control is in their approach to the collective representation of employees' interests. We saw in Chapter Eight that, although there is little evidence of aggressive anti-unionism, where trade unions are recognised management have either adopted an approach of effectively "using" the union in order to facilitate the introduction of new working practices (Auto Components), or else have adopted a stance of "non-engagement" with the unions (New Bank). And where they are not recognised (Office Tech and Hotel Co), a powerfully unitarist conception of workplace relationships pervades management thinking, and more or less subtle means are used to ensure that pressure for trade union representation is unlikely to surface from the shop-floor.

It was, however, in Chapter Seven that perhaps the strongest evidence to refute the "optimistic" interpretation of QM was presented, with support being found for many of the key arguments of the "exploitation" thesis. Most employees said they were now working harder, largely because of increases in production and workload, coupled with decreases in staffing levels. Technology was widely referred to at the two manufacturing companies as dictating the pace of work, and in general most employees said that the intensity of each minute of their work had actually increased (especially at New Bank). Many employees said they felt under pressure to meet production or sales targets and deadlines, which were felt to be leading to high levels of stress. There was also some evidence of "peer pressure" in teams.

As well as increasing effort levels, evidence was also found of an increase in the monitoring and surveillance of work. Straightforward manager or supervisor "over the

shoulder presence” was widely reported, with many referring to this as “spying”. Others referred to monitoring through performance appraisals, customer feedback, reject reports, and - particularly at New Bank - through productivity statistics. Many employees at New Bank mentioned the increasingly detailed measurement and timing of jobs, whilst at the two manufacturing companies a large proportion referred to the increased potential for “traceability” as a result of the requirement to book work onto computers. As well as monitoring work more closely, management were also reported to be taking a stricter approach to discipline, particularly in relation to poor quality work and absenteeism.

Furthermore, although there may be evidence of job enlargement and the widening of employee discretion, we should remain cautious in the inferences we draw from this. Many employees at Auto Components referred to the continuing boredom and monotony inherent in their jobs. At Office Tech too, the same feelings result from the particularly routinised and structured nature of production line work. And at New Bank and Hotel Co, although the nature of work tasks appears to some extent to be intrinsically more varied, employees reported increasing trends towards greater routinisation.

### **10.3 The Complexity of Employee Responses**

It is clear, then, that evidence can be found to support both the “optimistic” and the “exploitation” accounts of QM. However, the implication of the analysis presented here is that it is misleading to privilege one interpretation over the other. This should be apparent not least because of the sheer complexity of employee responses, of which many examples have been given.

In Chapter Seven, for instance, although evidence was presented to support the “exploitation” thesis, a number of important points were raised which caution against an overly pessimistic interpretation of the implications of QM for employees. Widely differing responses were found between employees from the new and the old factories at Auto Components, with those in the new factory reporting less of an increase in effort levels and less awareness of increases in monitoring and surveillance, calling into question the assumption of the exploitation theorists that all aspects of QM will necessarily lead to an increase in effort levels and to an intensification of work. Moreover, many employees expressed a clear preference for working as hard as they do, either because it made the working day appear to pass more quickly, or because of the sense of challenge and job satisfaction.

The difficulty with drawing swift conclusions when faced with evidence of increasing pressure and work intensification is well illustrated in the case of New Bank, whose employees are highly critical of management strategy and acutely aware of higher workloads and demanding targets, and yet are also the most likely from across the four companies to say that they enjoy their work. Similarly at Auto Components, although it is possible to argue convincingly that in the new factory work is now monitored with greater efficiency than previously, nevertheless the perception among employees is that there is less monitoring taking place.

Further similar examples can be cited. For instance, although employees across all four companies said firmly that management are taking a stricter approach to dealing with issues such as poor quality work, persistent lateness and absenteeism, nevertheless they

retain a more general sense of management being less strict in their approach to discipline. And with regard to task-based teamworking, even where this does not formally exist, a large proportion of employees nevertheless described themselves as working “in a team”, and the vast majority reported feeling a “sense of teamwork” within their work area.

An awareness of the complexity of employee views is equally necessary to prevent the tendency to draw overly *optimistic* interpretations from initial findings. For instance, although there is a considerable amount of evidence of employee commitment to the principles of quality improvement and customer satisfaction, it should not be inferred that there have therefore been deep-rooted changes in employees’ internal values. Rather, we have seen that employee co-operation with the espoused values of management often exists alongside continued scepticism and uncertainty. And if employees do show commitment to QM, this is less an indication of the full-scale adoption of a radically new set of values and beliefs, and more a sign of their appreciation of the economic “business realities” behind practical quality initiatives.

These examples are repeated in this concluding chapter because they illustrate the importance of probing employees views in some depth, in order to grasp what may lie behind surface appearances, such as the surface appearance of “strict discipline”, of an “absence of teamworking”, or of “commitment to quality”. They also illustrate the importance not only of recording employees own views, but even more importantly, of *taking account of these views* in one’s analysis. This may seem an obvious point, but it is striking how much of the more analytical literature on QM fails adequately to do this, as

discussed in Chapter One. The argument running through this thesis is that not only should employees' own views be sought in order to grasp the complexity of the processes involved, but that these views should also be taken at face value, and if they do not fit one's own assumptions - whether these are of the "optimist" or the "exploitationist" variety - they should nevertheless be respected, rather than dismissed as some form of false consciousness. The complexity of employee responses needs to be included in one's analysis, and not argued out of existence in order to fit a neat pre-conception of the nature and implications of quality management strategies.

#### **10.4 Conceptualising the Implications of QM: the Re-organisation of Control Thesis**

If one is to avoid privileging either the "optimistic" or the "exploitationist" interpretation of QM, and if the balance between these two viewpoints and the complexity of employee responses are to be taken into account, then the most useful way to conceptualise the implications of QM is in terms of a "re-organisation of control".

We have seen throughout the analysis that although employees may not be empowered, neither are they wholly dis-encharmed. For instance, it was argued in Chapter Five that management at all four companies wish to increasingly control or limit the extent of empowerment through teamworking (task-based teams are limited in their scope of influence, whilst problem-solving teams are more managerially-led and *ad hoc*). However, although "empowerment through teamwork" may be an overstatement, employees do value the increasing involvement that such team-based methods provide them with. In this respect, management thus appear to have conceded some genuine

autonomy to task-based and problem-solving teams, at the same time as consolidating their own control. What has occurred through teamworking is thus a general increase in the level of employee *involvement*, but within increasingly defined and measurable limits.

The same conclusion was drawn from the discussion of other more “individual” forms of involvement in Chapter Six. Generally employees feel they have had a genuine increase in discretion and autonomy, that it is easier to put ideas forward, and that management are more likely now to follow these ideas up. At the same time, however, the scope of this discretion and autonomy is clearly limited, both in terms of the range of issues to which it applies and the extent of real freedom from management intervention. Previous work by the same author (Rees, 1995) considered whether QM strategies tend to lead to “greater flexibility or new rigidities”?, and to “real empowerment or tighter control”? The simple answer is that there will be a balance between these factors. Employees may gain more *detailed* control, whilst management are likely to consolidate their more *general* control, thus leading to a shift in the overall “terrain of control” within the organisation.

Overall, it is apparent that the structure of authority at the four case study organisations was not radically changed by the QM initiatives, and managers and supervisors continued to exercise traditional powers. However, despite the fact that most employees were working harder, they did not appear to resent this. Indeed, most were satisfied to be working this hard. There was a recognition of the reality of competitive demands and of the rationale behind the QM strategy. Involvement in quality and in problem-solving was genuine, albeit tightly constrained by management control systems. All of this points to the conclusion that what has occurred is a re-organisation of control; although employees

were given greater autonomy and discretion over immediate work tasks, QM also invariably entailed an increase in managerial control in other respects.

If we consider again the categorisation of the literature presented in Chapter One, we can see how some aspects of both the “optimistic” and the “exploitation” perspectives are reflected in the findings. Considered as a whole, however, the results support neither the quality pundits, who assume that QM will necessarily transform organisations, nor those critics who see quality as simply a route to worker subordination. The former tend to neglect the constraints on quality programmes arising from job insecurity, stress and low morale, whilst the latter note these things but invariably assume that they are universal in their effects and that workers simply resent working harder. Rather, the findings presented here lend greatest weight to the “re-organisation of control” argument. As a result of his own case study research, Geary has noted

the paradox [that] as workers were given more autonomy they were increasingly coming under tighter managerial control (1994: 648).

Although sympathetic to Geary’s theoretical position, I would suggest that these twin dimensions of QM do not in the true sense represent a *paradox*, since they are in fact the inevitable outcome of any QM strategy. As such, it may be more fruitful to say that what they express is a fundamental *contradiction* at the heart of capitalist employment relations. As Hyman has observed of management strategy in general,

the key to any credible treatment of strategy .... is surely an emphasis on contradiction. Strategic choice exists, not because of the absence or weakness of structural determinations, but because these determinations are themselves contradictory .... There is no “one best way” of managing these contradictions, only different routes to partial failure .... Employers require workers to be *both* dependable *and* disposable .... Contradictory pressures within capitalism help explain the restless but fruitless search for managerial panaceas (1987: 30 and 43).



In broad terms, quality management can perhaps best be seen as just the latest of these management panaceas to gain widespread influence (and one that is itself now being apparently superseded by other all-embracing concepts, such as “business process re-engineering”). The contention here is that as a management strategy QM has proved as unsuccessful in overcoming fundamental contradictions as those which preceded it, but that this should not surprise us, since it is necessarily so. As Wilkinson and Willmott have more recently concluded,

the “quality revolution” can be seen as the most recent move in a developing process in which the organisation of production is subordinated to the *contradictory logics of capitalist labour processes*. Means are now sought for securing an adequate return on capital in a situation where the basis of competition is quality and speed of innovation, not just price. To accommodate this shift, and thus to contribute to this change, quality initiatives are introduced that in many cases *expand employee discretion and eliminate sources of frustration as they extend and reinforce processes of management control* (1995: 11) [my emphasis].

### 10.5 Explaining Differences: Contingency Theory

We have seen how a wide variety of different aspects of QM can contribute to this extension and reinforcement of management control, such as: the routinisation and standardisation of production and work tasks; techniques for more closely monitoring and measuring work output and performance; increasingly tight discipline; pressures to conform to team or group expectations; and appraisal systems linking performance more closely to measurable indicators of product quality or customer satisfaction. Just as there are a range of different factors which influence the nature of the QM strategy within a particular organisation, so too will there be variations in the precise means through which control is mediated.

What, then, explains these variations? This chapter has so far highlighted what is *common* across the four case study organisations, namely that for employees themselves QM simultaneously has both positive and negative consequences. And I have argued that the most constructive way of conceptualising the balance between these different consequences is in terms of the re-organisation of control thesis. Plainly, however, the nature of the re-organisation of control will differ between the different cases. The balance between control and commitment will vary in different organisational circumstances. It is here that contingency theory is useful in terms of explaining the factors which may have led to a *different* balance between control and commitment in each case. This section of the chapter thus draws upon the analytical themes discussed in Chapter Nine.

One of the crucial determining factors in the extent of employee commitment to QM would appear to be the nature of the “quality message” and the way that this is communicated by management. We saw in Chapter Four that Auto Components use a wide range of communication methods, many of which employees find very useful. More importantly, managers at the company communicate a strong and simple message in a firm and coherent way; namely, that product quality leads to customer satisfaction, which in turn leads to enhanced job security. Relatively speaking, the ideology of QM at both Office Tech and New Bank is rather more idealistic, and perhaps fails as a result to generate the same degree of employee commitment. At Office Tech there has been markedly less investment in formal communication methods like notice boards and newsletters, but what is more crucial is the fact that management give out mixed

messages. If management lack a consistent and coherent message, employees are consequently more likely to feel confused and indifferent.

There is clearly, then, a degree of scope for strategic choice on the part of management in terms of influencing the extent of employee “buy-in” to quality ideas. Other evidence for this comes from the nature of problem-solving teamworking, where differences in levels of employee awareness and enthusiasm seem largely explicable in terms of the varying degrees of management commitment to it across the four companies. At both Auto Components and Hotel Co, management have, in general, remained committed to the continuation of quality circle-type groups since they were first introduced as a key component of “soft QM”, and employees show a correspondingly high commitment to them. By contrast, at both Office Tech and New Bank this commitment is somewhat lower. In both cases quality circles were initially seen as a fundamental part of the QM strategy, but they subsequently declined in significance, as management either failed to provide continuing support for them (Office Tech), or else began increasingly to question the rationale behind their operation (New Bank).

The degree of employee satisfaction with training provision would also appear to be heavily dependent upon the extent of management commitment to it, in terms of whether the ideals communicated to employees are reflected in practice. We saw in the previous chapter that, despite their clear recognition of the amount of training having increased markedly since the QM strategy was first introduced, most employees in the new shop at Auto Components clearly felt that it was inadequate. The main criticism was that production requirements too often meant that training got sidelined, so despite the high

ideals which management communicated about the reason for the training, employees could see the reality of a lack of managerial commitment to it. Once again, then, if expectations are raised but then not met, resentment on the part of employees is likely to follow. Management at Office Tech, by contrast, communicate more limited training ideals, seeing it solely in terms of on-the-job training. Employees thus have a clear understanding of what the training is for, and when it is delivered as described there is far less scope for criticism and resentment. Hotel Co would appear to be the most successful of the four cases in terms of delivering on their training promises, and employee satisfaction with training is consequently that much higher.

So far I have stressed the scope which management have for influencing the extent of employee commitment to QM, citing examples of what in Chapter Nine was referred to as the importance of *process*. However, this scope of course has its limits, and this brings us to the importance of *context*. Management operate in specific organisational contexts, and elements of this context can condition the breadth of strategic choice to a considerable extent.

One crucial contextual variable is the market in which companies operate. We saw in Chapter Four that not only did employees themselves at the two manufacturing firms rate the ability to compete on price as more important than those at the two service sector organisations, but there was also a further distinction between the two manufacturing firms, with those at Auto Components rating it as more significant than their counterparts at Office Tech. This can be explained because competition for valve seat guides is more intense than that for photo-copying machines, and Auto Components consequently

operates in a more price-sensitive market. A clearer example of the influence of the market on the nature of management strategy was discussed in Chapter Five, where it was noted that, in the manufacturing sector in particular, the position of a company in the product supply chain can have a direct influence upon the extent to which management feel it is necessary to introduce certain HRM-style practices, such as problem-solving teams. Managers at Auto Components spoke of the increasingly broad auditing procedures of the large car companies which they supply, which now demand that suppliers exhibit a wide range of “hard” and “soft” QM policies. In contrast, managers at Office Tech are not subject to these same pressures, since they occupy a different position in the supply chain as a final producer of photo-copiers.

We have also seen how both the cultural and the historical context within which organisations operate can make it more or less difficult for management to generate employee commitment to QM. Managers at Office Tech talked openly of the “culture clash” within the company, and it was apparent that, largely due to the influence of the Japanese parent company, the QM strategy at Office Tech had initially entailed a far grander cultural project than that at - for instance - Auto Components. As such, managers found it more difficult to engender widespread commitment to it among employees, and conflicts have been inevitable. It was concluded that whilst Office Tech appear in this way to be burdened by their history, managers at Auto Components are in some ways liberated by theirs. Employees at Auto Components tend to have been at the company longer than those at Office Tech. Many of them remember how close the company came to closing during the recession of the early 1980s, and they have a respect for

management for having “saved” them from this fate, something which also explains the far greater levels of loyalty towards the company among Auto Components employees.

In terms of the scope for generating employee commitment to new management practices, an important dimension of the historical context of any organisation will be the nature of existing management/employee relations, and the role that representative structures have played in the development and implementation of strategic change. A similar study involving the same author (Collinson, Rees and Edwards, 1996) examined six unionised companies, and found that the existence of strong co-operative relationships with relevant trade unions eased the acceptance of QM. In two cases, managers welcomed the role of the union and this helped develop relations of trust with the workforce. In two others, the absence of strong working relationships between management and unions made it harder to communicate the QM message. The same argument can be advanced on the basis of the evidence presented in Chapter Eight. The company that has the highest levels of employee commitment to QM is Auto Components, a unionised company where there is a constructive and open dialogue between stewards and management, and a strong union identity on the shop-floor; rather than challenging the role of the union, management are effectively “using” the union as another dimension to their communication strategy. And as regards the two case study companies that do not recognise trade unions, one of them (Office Tech) has a clear policy of “union avoidance”, and this is the company that has in many respects the lowest levels of employee commitment to QM. The clear implication is that the adoption by management of a constructive partnership with trade unions can in many cases facilitate the introduction and operation of quality management practices (see also: Scott, 1994).

What this emphasis on context does above all else is undermine the implicit assumption within much of the more prescriptive QM literature that a given set of quality procedures and practices can be introduced into any organisation and have the desired effect of generating employee commitment. This is perhaps best illustrated by the case of New Bank, a company that has introduced a whole plethora of new initiatives in the name of customer satisfaction, quality improvement and cultural change, and yet these have singularly failed to lead to enhanced employee commitment. Across the four companies, feelings of loyalty are by far the lowest among New Bank employees. They are more aware of increasing levels of communication than are employees at the other three companies, but at the same time they are also by far the most sceptical about what is being communicated. Attempts to “empower” clerical grades through widening discretion and greater personal contact with customers have backfired, with a perceived decline in the quality of customer service leading to feelings of greater stress rather than any sense of liberation. Senior management at the bank are determined to push ahead with fundamental restructuring, but many employees perceive the pace of change to have been too quick, and the widespread job losses that have occurred across the whole industry heighten their sense of insecurity. To this extent, the case of New Bank highlights what was identified in the previous chapter as one of the most important contingent factors in explaining differing levels of commitment to QM; namely, employees’ perceptions of their own job security.

## 10.6 Disciplined Workers?

We have seen clearly, then, the importance of contextual factors in shaping the degree of employee commitment to QM. Cultural and historical factors, as well as the market and employee relations context, help to explain employees' responses to organisational change. And job security would appear to be particularly significant in terms of shaping both employee commitment to QM as well as wider perceptions of job satisfaction.

Whilst it is intuitively not surprising that perceptions of high job security lead to enhanced job satisfaction, a more challenging hypothesis is that the closer measurement and monitoring of work will have the same effect. In the parallel study by Collinson, Rees and Edwards this certainly appeared to be the case. Organisations where workers were most likely to say that they were working harder and more subject to managerial monitoring were also those where trust in management and acceptance of quality programmes was highest. Moreover, performance appraisal and monitoring were to some extent associated with employees' perceived influence over quality. These results, which compare organisations at one point in time, are also consistent with a recent longitudinal study within one firm (Wood and Peccei, 1995) which found that experience of appraisal and involvement in suggestion schemes went along with a favourable view of quality.

Up to a point, these studies suggest that the use of appraisal and monitoring systems does not lead to resentment. On the contrary, it promotes acceptance of quality programmes and wider trust in management. Although correlations between the various relevant parts of the data presented here do not produce results with a significant enough degree of



probability, nevertheless we have seen other evidence which suggests, with a degree of caution, that the same conclusion is appropriate. Certainly we found little evidence in Chapter Seven of new appraisal systems leading to increases in stress and pressure for employees. If anything, the greater measurement of work through clearer appraisal would seem to be welcomed, and most employees in principle support attempts to more closely identify individual performance.

More generally, we have seen that awareness of tighter discipline and stricter targets often goes hand in hand with an expressed satisfaction with work. Employees clearly prefer training that is disciplined and targeted rather than vague and idealistic. And increasing effort levels and the closer monitoring of work are not necessarily resented. All of this points to employees accepting tighter discipline, and not to a tendency for QM to be associated with greater employee alienation. The direction of these effects runs counter to the expectations of an exploitation thesis, with more intense control being associated with more favourable views of quality. I have already dealt with the limitations of the exploitationist view. Suffice it to say here that although exploitation in the pure sense is indeed a mark of any capitalist management strategy, what may characterise QM is a particular form of more “competent exploitation” which is, as a consequence, less likely to be resented by employees. Work may indeed be harder, but employees appear to welcome the fact that it is also more formal and routinised. The “disciplined worker thesis” may thus be applicable.

Certainly it has been demonstrated here that employees have pragmatic expectations of QM, and rather than having been misled by a new managerial ideology (as the

exploitationist view would have us believe), it is more accurate to conclude that they have in fact welcomed some of the disciplines and sense of direction that QM strategies imply. A common feature across the four case study organisations has also been the degree to which managers themselves express the view that employees do not feel comfortable with the “empowerment” that they have at their disposal, and that they favour those elements of QM which imply greater monitoring and routinisation. This attitude is certainly reflected in the following comments from managers at three of the four case study organisations:

Some people .... want a job without pressure where they don't have to think and where a lot of what they do is a mechanical knee jerk reaction. The thing comes in front of them and they do it .... They know when they are going to get their break, and they know exactly how long the break is for. There are no grey areas, it's a very structured day, and some people are perfectly happy doing that. (Senior Personnel Officer, Office Tech)

I think a lot of people actually like to be regimented .... and they also like to hide behind not having to make a decision .... I don't think it's as interesting for the staff, but there's a lot of people who like that sort of regimentation, and that's the way we're going, towards an assembly line. (Branch Manager, New Bank)

I keep files [on every maid] and there are lists every day with their names by the side of each room. They know this, but they don't mind at all. (Housekeeping Manager, Hotel Co)

### **10.7 Managers' Attitudes Towards QM**

Whilst managers often believe that employees prefer a more disciplined work routine, we have seen too that managerial roles themselves are in some ways also becoming subject to greater routinisation; consider, for instance, the trends at both New Bank and Hotel Co towards standardisation in the way that managerial staff are required to deal with customers, as described in Chapter Three.

More generally, across the four case study organisations managers have experienced a wide range of pressures as a consequence of the moves towards QM. It would clearly be wrong to give the impression that managers are charged with introducing quality initiatives, and that these initiatives have various effects on employees but do not impact in equal measure upon managerial roles. Indeed, a further thesis could be written on the implications of QM for managers. This study has explicitly concentrated on the perceptions of lower-grade employees, and as such has not explored managers' views in any great depth, other than to the extent that they are reflected in the descriptive sections in each of the substantive chapters. In considering very briefly what some of the major implications for managers appear to be, a number of the issues which arise reflect debates about the role of management alluded to in Chapter One.

Firstly, for instance, many of the trends associated with QM, such as the standardisation of procedures, are seen as undermining the skills and authority of managers. At New Bank, for example, the threat to the lending discretion of managers from standardisation and from technological advances was widely referred to:

If I lent someone some money they could come in next week and see someone completely different who could deal with the situation. It could be done now by a monkey, whereas before it required a little bit of experience, and a bit of technical expertise ..... Standardisation of procedures involves complete de-skilling, so as to ensure that a bright young bloke of 27 or 28 can become the manager of a branch.  
(Branch Manager, New Bank)

There is also evidence that some middle managers have felt threatened by the widening discretion and autonomy afforded to their subordinates through the "empowerment" process, perhaps particularly so at Hotel Co:

One of the managers' privileges - so they thought themselves - was to deal with complaints. They hated doing it, but saw it as something that they dealt with. So when we said to them 'You don't have to deal with them, let your staff deal with them, and they can do "whatever it takes" to sort that guest out, whether it be a smile, buying them a drink, giving them a free weekend or whatever', they had a real problem with that, and they thought 'Bloody hell, it's anarchy now is it'? (General Manager, Hotel Co)

At the beginning .... it was seen as almost a disease to have the word "manager" in your title because you would be seen as this incompetent fool next to the staff who are wonderful and can do no wrong. (Reservations Manager, Hotel Co)

Aside from threats to the authority of middle managers as a result of the widening discretion of lower-grade employees, there was also evidence of some specialist management functions feeling particularly vulnerable, especially where problem-solving was being centred more and more around multi-disciplinary teams. This was particularly the case at the two manufacturing companies:

Where I think there may be some resentment .... is where you have an engineer who wants to spend £60,000 on a solution to a problem, with the latest technology and something really sexy, and then someone on the shop-floor comes up with a quick and simple idea that costs £400, because he's closer to the problem and suggests just welding on an extra bit of metal somewhere or whatever. So they have undermined the engineers way of thinking, which is 'I will design something to solve the problem'. (Quality Manager, Auto Components)

The assistant manager or the manager doesn't have a divine right to good ideas. Where they do feel they are being skirted is in this teamwork concept of "project management". They sometimes feel that in looking at some of the wider issues there are people below their level who are being involved when they should be involved. (Personnel Director, Office Tech)

In highlighting some of the threats and challenges that QM brings to middle management, it would be misleading, however, to imply that it is managers themselves who are at fault. As the report by Collinson, Rees and Edwards (1996) pointed out, these threats and challenges invariably arise as a consequence of the way management systems and structures operate, rather than as a consequence of the particular personnel of middle

management. In other words, middle managers are not themselves resistant to quality ideas, but they are likely to take a more pragmatic approach than senior managers. Whilst senior managers may develop the enthusiasm of the convert to new ideas, middle managers - living with day-to-day issues of juggling different demands - may lack the same zeal.

A central argument in this final chapter has been that although managers have a degree of strategic choice over the precise means or *process* through which the QM strategy is formulated and communicated, nevertheless their scope for influencing the extent of employee commitment to QM is heavily constrained by the *context* in which they are operating. These constraints need to be borne in mind too when considering the responses of managers themselves to QM. Realism on the part of middle managers should not be confused with hostility towards quality ideas, and the freedom of middle managers to control their own destinies is in any event limited. Some of the most important constraints upon managers are increasingly those imposed by financial control systems (cf. Keen, 1995; Watson, 1994). Middle managers operate within financial disciplines, and it is the balancing of competing priorities, and not some fundamental “resistance to quality”, which tends to drive their reactions. Certainly managers in this study were acutely aware of such financial pressures, as the following comments very clearly illustrate:

In the 1960s it was all about production .... In the 1970s it was sales .... In the late 1980s it was all about quality .... But .... accountants now run businesses, not salesmen .... It's certainly very very true here .... The accounts department is now .... the predominant force .... Whatever remains from those previous dynasties, accountancy now sweeps them aside and they are all answerable to the accountants signature. (Senior Personnel Officer, Office Tech)

There is a paranoia about cost-cutting .... Our customers are telling us that our service is deteriorating, and it's directly connected with a massive cost-cutting exercise .... I'm not the only one who's telling them [senior management] it's a resourcing problem. There are rumours that people are being paid in terms of how much cost-cutting they can do, and you just get a bit cynical about the whole thing. (Branch Manager, New Bank)

Over the last two years we've had to move to being profit-driven, and so we've gone back to where we were 8 or 9 years ago in terms of being very strict about meeting payroll costs and food costs ..... TQM involved a lot more flexibility, a lot less audit and a lot less control, and then we reached a point where we weren't achieving profitability, and we had to put all those things back in again. (General Manager, Hotel Co)

### **10.8 Does QM Work?**

Given the extent of the constraints that management may have to operate within, it is pertinent, finally, to consider briefly the implications of this analysis for management practice; or - to put it more simply - to ask the question "does QM work"?

It would certainly appear that a particular set of circumstances seem conducive to QM working. These include: a climate of relative job security; a clear set of operating principles; endeavours to clearly communicate the goals of the quality programme; the ability of management to look beyond the boundaries of short-term pressures; and - in some cases - a working relationship with trade unions. From the four case study organisations, Auto Components probably comes closest to meeting these criteria, and it is indeed here that we have found probably the highest levels of employee commitment to QM. In contrast, to the extent that any or most of these conditions are absent - as in the case of New Bank - we find a great deal more scepticism and uncertainty on the part of employees.

The question remains as to how much of this employee commitment is actually directly attributable to QM. It is a question which managers themselves at the four case study organisations found very difficult to answer. And from this analysis it is of course impossible to say what would have happened in the absence of QM in each of the four cases. I have stressed in this final chapter the importance of contextual factors such as the climate of job security and organisational history and culture, aspects which are not in themselves constituent elements of QM programmes. If the effects of these constituent elements are to be more clearly isolated, further research will be needed which compares QM with non-QM organisations.

What we can say is that the results presented here certainly suggest that QM can be a partial success. Employees clearly did embrace quality principles, despite the evident increase in work pressure which such principles tended to bring with them. As other research involving the same author has concluded (Collinson, Rees and Edwards, 1996; Rees, Scarbrough and Terry, 1996), quality programmes can perhaps in this respect be seen as catalysts, bringing out a latent willingness to take responsibility and providing a focus and rationale for efforts at involvement. Also important here is the symbolism of change. Storey (1992) has argued, for example, that HRM was important not because it necessarily had identifiable effects on the shop-floor but because it created a language and a set of beliefs which gave managers a sense of vision and purpose. QM may have analogous effects in that it helps to create purpose in a world of turbulence.

It is also clear from this analysis that any assessment of the success or otherwise of QM essentially turns on what criteria are being used to measure it. Some argue that QM tends

invariably to fail, in the sense that it does not lead to fundamental changes in employees' internal values, or to substantial increases in "customer satisfaction" (cf. Knights, 1995). However, what this thesis has sought to demonstrate is that focusing solely on whether QM has "empowered" employees and led to widespread quality improvements can lead to a polarised debate, with those who conclude that it has not secured these goals perhaps using an unduly harsh test of success. Seen instead as a relatively modest set of initiatives designed to encourage a sharper focus on customer service, QM can be seen to have had a degree of success.

In other words, whether the conclusion is drawn that QM has succeeded or not depends on what management are considered to be attempting to achieve. For those managers interviewed at the four case study organisations, "quality" meant doing what they were doing more effectively and giving employees some say in the process. Despite the often messianic tone of the "mission statement", anything more than this was not considered to be a realistic possibility. In this sense, just as we have seen that employees tend to see QM in relatively narrow pragmatic terms, so "employee empowerment" in any developed sense was not seriously on the management agenda. There seems to be a growing recognition that QM should be conceptualised in these pragmatic terms. Hill, Peccei and Rosenthal (1996), for example, report a case study of a retail organisation in which management had quite limited objectives and workers welcomed these without seeing them as revolutionary. This pragmatism, I have argued, is a reflection of fundamental structured antagonisms in the nature of capitalist work relations. To quote Hyman once again:



Capital is .... faced with essentially contradictory requirements: to *limit* the discretion which workers may apply against its interests; and to *harness* the willing application to profitable production of that discretion which can not be eliminated .... The notion of *contradiction* is again crucial: the function of labour control involves *both* the direction, surveillance and discipline of subordinates whose enthusiastic commitment to corporate objectives can not be taken for granted; *and* the mobilisation of the discretion, initiative and diligence which coercive supervision, far from guaranteeing, is likely to destroy .... Shifting fashions in labour management stem from this inherent contradiction: solutions to the problem of discipline aggravate the problem of consent, and vice versa. Accordingly, *pragmatism* may well be the most rational management principle (1987: 40-41 and 42) [my emphasis].

Considered in this way, QM may indeed be the latest fashion, but it is again no different to any previous management strategy which has aimed to generate the commitment of employees to corporate objectives. This thesis has sought to demonstrate that in considering the implications of any particular instance of QM, what one will find is a re-organisation of control, whereby an organisationally specific mix of contingent factors leads to a particular balance between control and consent. For employees there is likely to be some genuine extension of discretion and autonomy, albeit relating only to the detail of their immediate work situation, whilst at the same time management will consolidate their more general control. And the argument has been advanced that the best way of making sense of this shifting terrain of control is by reference to the notion of contradiction. Moreover, we have seen that although they may not conceive of the issue in the same terms, most managers are themselves not blind to the effects of these contradictions, and as a consequence pragmatism will indeed tend to be their most likely response.

## TABLES

Key: AC = Auto Components [AC(N) = new shop / AC(O) = old shop]

OT = Office Tech

NB = New Bank

HC = Hotel Co

All figures are percentages. All percentages, other than those divisible by .5, have been rounded to the nearest whole number. The figures in brackets show the number of respondents.

**Table 4.1 Change in management communication**

	AC	OT	NB	HC
a great deal more	42	29	62	55
a little more	34	47	30	24
hardly any difference	18	18	8.5	16
not as much	6	5		5
	(50)	(38)	(47)	(38)

**Table 4.2 Communication methods**

	1	2	3	4	
<i>Auto Components</i>					
notice boards	66	34			(50)
company newsletters	24	54	20	2	(50)
team briefings (NS)	24	68	4	4	(25)
MDs address	56	38	4	2	(50)
directors briefings	24	33	24	18	(33)
informal communications	22	62	8	8	(50)
<i>Office Tech</i>					
notice boards	6	58	36		(36)
company newsletters	6	56	28	11	(36)
team briefings	53	44	3		(36)
MDs address	14	43	34	9	(35)
informal communications	33	42	17	8	(36)
<i>New Bank</i>					
notice boards	23	47	28	2	(47)
procedural circulars	4	68	25.5	2	(47)
staff-related circulars	17	66	15	2	(47)
communications meetings	45	53	2		(47)
video communications	34	40	21	4	(47)
informal communications	48	48	4		(46)
<i>Hotel Co</i>					
notice boards	40	50	10		(48)
company newsletters	28	48	24		(46)
team briefings	60	36	4		(47)
quarterly meetings	56	40	2	2	(48)
informal communications	44	42	12.5	2	(48)

Note: 1 very successful; 2 moderately successful; 3 of little use; 4 of no use at all.

**Table 4.3 Increases in trust as a result of communication**

	AC	OT	NB	HC
a very large extent	20	16	11	33
a fairly large extent	46	29	34	35
some extent	32	34	38	31
not at all	2	21	17	
	(50)	(38)	(47)	(48)

**Table 4.4 The importance of quality**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Importance of concept of quality</i>					
most important issue	56	36	37	28	25
very important	44	64	58	62	50
fairly important				8.5	17
of some importance			5	2	6
not very important					2
of no importance					
	(25)	(25)	(38)	(47)	(48)
<i>Definition of quality</i>					
quality of product	44	29	53	14	6
customer satisfaction / service	28	25	6	68	36
securing orders / competitiveness	16	29	6		3
quality of working environment	8				6
everything company does	4	17	31	18	44
quality circles			3		3
personal responsibility					3
	(25)	(24)	(32)	(44)	(36)

**Table 4.5 Awareness of QM concepts**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
<i>Auto Components</i>							
quality	50	44	4	2			(50)
continuous improvement	30	28	24	18			(50)
customer satisfaction	70	16	10	4			(50)
internal and external customers	14	10	24	18	14	20	(50)
employee empowerment	8	12	26	20	20	14	(50)
total quality management	20	30	22	14	8	6	(50)
changing work culture	16	34	32	10	6	2	(50)
<i>Office Tech</i>							
quality	46	18	25	4		7	(28)
continuous improvement	18	32	32	11	7		(28)
customer satisfaction	36	11	18	25		11	(28)
internal and external customers	14	11	21	29	18	7	(28)
employee empowerment	11	4	15	33	22	15	(27)
total quality management	15	27	23	11.5	15	8	(26)
changing work culture	11.5	15	35	31		8	(26)
<i>New Bank</i>							
quality	23	56	13	4			(45)
continuous improvement	18	53.5	20	7	2		(45)
customer satisfaction	33	53	11	2			(45)
internal and external customers	12	28	30	19	9	2	(43)
employee empowerment	4	7	40	31	13	4	(45)
total quality management	4.5	16	27	36	14	2	(44)
changing work culture	11	38	20	31			(45)
<i>Hotel Co</i>							
quality	36	33	19	7	5		(42)
continuous improvement	19.5	32	29	15	5		(41)
customer satisfaction	58	25	10		7.5		(40)
internal and external customers	24	22	27	17	7	2	(41)
employee empowerment	36	38	14	9.5		2	(42)
total quality management	37	22	24	10	5	2	(41)
changing work culture	17	17	24	24	14	5	(42)

Note: 1 it is built in to everything that workers do; 2 there is a very high level of awareness; 3 there is a fairly high level of awareness; 4 there is some awareness; 5 there is little awareness; 6 there is no awareness at all.

**Table 4.6 Factors upon which company success depends**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
<i>Auto Components</i>							
the efforts of individual employees	46	40	14				(50)
the efforts of managers	46	40	12	2			(50)
use of the latest technology	68	28	4				(50)
methods of ensuring consistent quality	72	28					(50)
the ability to compete on price	80	20					(50)
economic factors beyond the company's control	34	44	16	4		2	(50)
<i>Office Tech</i>							
the efforts of individual employees	41	37.5	12.5	6		3	(32)
the efforts of managers	41	34	19	3	3		(32)
use of the latest technology	32	32	29	3	3		(31)
methods of ensuring consistent quality	66	16	9	6		3	(32)
the ability to compete on price	48	26	13	10		3	(31)
economic factors beyond the company's control	23	23	32	16	6.5		(31)
<i>New Bank</i>							
the efforts of individual employees	43	38	6	8.5	4		(47)
the efforts of managers	29	47	15	4	4		(47)
use of the latest technology	36	34	25.5	2	2		(47)
methods of ensuring consistent quality	49	38	8.5	2	2		(47)
the ability to compete on price	19	40	21	15	4		(47)
economic factors beyond the company's control	2	21	47	28	2		(47)
<i>Hotel Co</i>							
the efforts of individual employees	63	24	9	2		2	(46)
the efforts of managers	63	24	4		6.5	2	(46)
use of the latest technology	9	30	41	11	4	4	(46)
methods of ensuring consistent quality	63	24	6.5	4	2		(46)
the ability to compete on price	39	26	26	4	4		(46)
economic factors beyond the company's control	13	37	35	6.5	4	4	(46)

Note: 1 of paramount importance; 2 very important; 3 fairly important;  
4 of some importance; 5 of little importance; 6 not important at all.

**Table 4.7 Opinion of QM strategy**

	AC	OT	NB	HC
<i>Initial attitude to QM strategy</i>				
strongly in favour	48	28	13	62
slightly in favour	28	25	28	17
neither opposed nor in favour	14	42	52	21
slightly opposed	8		4	
strongly opposed	2	6	2	
	(50)	(36)	(46)	(47)
<i>Reasons for initial support / opposition* to QM strategy</i>				
good thing / best way forward / future / common sense	35	41	23	29
necessary for competitive reasons / company survival /				
reacting to customer needs	23	12	41	21
for better working conditions / standards	12	6	4.5	12.5
wanted more skills / responsibility / challenge /				
personal benefit	5		4.5	4
for sense of teamwork	5	12		
increases sense of involvement				29
to increase quality awareness		6		
for job security	5			
*some aspects not right / apprehension / uncertainty	9	12	23	4
*workforce not considered	5		4.5	
*problem-solving is job of management not workers	2			
	(45)	(17)	(22)	(24)
<i>Change in opinion of QM strategy</i>				
yes	60	50	54	40.5
no	40	50	45	59.5
	(50)	(36)	(46)	(42)
<i>Way that opinion of QM strategy has changed</i>				
a lot more supportive	37	17	23	71
more supportive	60	61	65	23.5
less supportive	3	17	11.5	6
a lot less supportive		6		
	(30)	(18)	(26)	(17)
<i>Reasons for increasing support / opposition* to QM strategy</i>				
seen benefits / improvements / more aware of reasons	62	50	68	67
teamworking works / involvement & communication	10	17	4	17
has made job easier / more control / job satisfaction	7	8		8
in staff interest to support change			12	
has given job security	10			
increases trust / respect for management	7			
*mgmt too distant / not interested in employees		17	4	
*decreased in effectiveness / too many procedures	3			8
*de-motivating / unstructured / no prospects		8		
*can not work in practice due to staff shortages			4	
	(29)	(12)	(25)	(12)

**Table 4.8 Expectation of further changes**

	AC	OT	NB	HC
<i>Likelihood of further changes</i>				
yes	96	94	87	50
no	4	6	13	50
	(50)	(36)	(45)	(46)
<i>Nature of changes expected</i>				
more teamworking & flexibility / general on-going improvements / more on "vision" / TQM	23	18	32	47
less people to do more work / workforce reduction	6	7	15	20
new machinery / automation / new technology	35	11	18	
change in mgmt & supervisory structures		25	9	7
don't know		11	3	7
new & better products / product changes	15	29		
changes in delivery strategy			21	
more shifts / continuous working / changing working patterns	17			
restructuring of departments				7
more pressure / more stress				7
BS 5750				7
more & better training / self training within cells / more emphasis on staff	4			
less staff benefits			3	
	(48)	(28)	(34)	(15)
<i>Support for expected changes</i>				
yes	83	59	51	64.5
indifferent	8	29	32	23
no	8	12	17	13
	(48)	(34)	(41)	(31)
<i>Reasons for support / opposition* to expected changes</i>				
business & competitive reasons / will make company more successful & secure	55	16	52	23
will give employees chance to learn more varied skills / responsibilities	9.5	26	8	8
will give customer satisfaction / less complaints	2	5	4	23
more job security	19	21		
any improvement is good			8	23
will make job easier with automation	5			
*prefer present way of working / will cause disruption / changes gone too far	9.5	10.5		8
*quality of service will decrease			28	
*threat of losing job				15
*will be more work for no extra money / more stress		5		
	(42)	(19)	(25)	(13)



**Table 4.9 Levels of trust and loyalty**

	AC	OT	NB	HC
<i>Level of trust between management and employees</i>				
complete trust	4	3		11
trust most of the time	56	16	34	61
a fair amount of trust	32	50	51	22
not much trust	8	32	15	6.5
no trust at all				
	(50)	(38)	(47)	(46)
<i>Change in level of trust</i>				
increased	30	11	31	36
stayed the same	60	72	42	44
decreased	10	17	27	20.5
	(50)	(36)	(45)	(39)
<i>Reasons for increase / decrease* in level of trust</i>				
more mgmt & worker communication / better atmosphere / better mgmt style & attitude	60	44	48	56
can see benefits of change	15			12
*mgmt less interested / broken promises / communicate less / don't support staff / less personal	25	22	36	12
*too many mgmt changes / conflict with each other		22	4	18
*workforce constantly penalised		11		
*involuntary redundancies / uncertainty over job security			8	
	(20)	(9)	(25)	(17)
<i>Level of loyalty towards the company</i>				
a great deal	70	35	21	48
a fair amount	26	30	38	48
a little	4	24	23	2
hardly any		5	15	2
none at all		5	2	
	(50)	(37)	(47)	(48)

**Table 5.1 Definition of teamwork**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Extent of teamworking</i>					
individually	8	100	30	33	31
in a team	92		70	67	69
	(25)	(25)	(40)	(48)	(49)
<i>Definition of team</i>					
			<u>OT</u>	<u>NB</u>	
people working together / to achieve aims			32	48	
other dept / unit / section members			32	24	
employees on the line			26		
whole branch / business centre				17	
manager and assistant				12	
operators and supervisors / junior mgmt			10.5		
			(19)	(42)	

**Table 5.2 Nature of team organisation**

	AC	OT	NB	HC
<i>Choice over working in a team</i>				
yes	64	25	7	33
no	36	75	93	67
	(25)	(36)	(42)	(42)
<i>Nature of team organisation</i>				
management requires you to work in teams	12.5	15	11	5
employees help one another regardless of mgmt's intentions	25	30	18	38
both	62.5	54.5	71	57
	(16)	(33)	(34)	(37)
<i>Reasons for choosing to work in a team</i>				
efficient / logical way to work		43	67	40
learn from input of others	12.5	57		30
the future / new ideas	31		33	
change / challenge	25			
new skills / better myself	19			10
work with experienced people				10
enjoyable / rewarding				10
job security	6			
more money	6			
	(16)	(7)	(3)	(10)
<i>Movement between teams</i>				
usually work with one particular work group	52	69	79	
sometimes move from one work group to another	40	17	11	
often move from one work group to another	8	14	11	
	(25)	(36)	(47)	

**Table 5.3 Sense of teamwork**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Help with problems within team</i>					
always	84	68	42	69	60.5
sometimes	16	32	53	29	39.5
rarely			3	2	
never			3		
	(25)	(25)	(36)	(48)	(43)
<i>Sense of teamwork</i>					
very strong	16	36	11	29	31
fairly strong	68	36	47	50	50
neither strong nor weak	8	27	36	15	12
fairly weak	8		6	4	
very weak					
	(25)	(22)	(36)	(48)	(42)
<i>Change in sense of teamwork</i>					
increased	40	54.5	71	49	57
little or no change	32	32	23	41	29
decreased	28	14	6	10	14
	(25)	(22)	(35)	(39)	(35)
<i>Responsibility of team for organising work</i>					
increased	68		51.5	69	61
stayed much the same	28		42	23	33
decreased	4		6	8	6
	(25)		(33)	(39)	(36)
<i>Allocation of work</i>					
assigned to group for allocation within group	52		15	26	32.5
allocated to each individual worker	48		85	74	67.5
	(25)		(33)	(43)	(40)

**Table 5.4 Changes in nature of teamworking**

	AC (N)
<i>Change in nature of teamwork</i>	
yes	56
no	44
	(25)
<i>Type of change occurred</i>	
bigger teams / more people in teams	50
more co-operation / flexibility within teams	29
more training within teams	7
enthusiasm and morale decreased / mgmt broken promises	14
	(14)

**Table 5.5 Extent of preference for working individually**

	AC (O)
<i>Sense of teamwork in work area</i>	
yes	84
no	16
	(25)
<i>Preference for working individually or in a team</i>	
prefer working individually	76
would prefer to be in a team	24
	(25)

**Table 5.6 Influence of self, supervisor and work group**

	AC(N)			AC(O)		OT			NB			HC		
	you	sup.	grp.	you	sup.	you	sup.	grp.	you	sup.	grp.	you	sup.	grp.
<i>the pace at which you work</i>														
1	60	8	8	68	8	47	30	24	73	19	17	59.5	29	26
2	32	44	48	28	29	12.5	36	21	14	35	29	31	40.5	41
3	8	36	20	4	37.5	16	21	21	9	42	39	7	24	28
4		12	24		25	25	12	34.5	4.5	5	15	2	7	5
	(25)	(25)	(25)	(25)	(24)	(32)	(33)	(29)	(44)	(43)	(41)	(42)	(42)	(39)
<i>deciding what tasks you are to do</i>														
1	24	48	8	12	67	28	53	11	46.5	39	15	42	33	15
2	48	40	28	40	21	28	29	18	23	36	19.5	39.5	44	35
3	24	12	36	20	12.5	25	9	25	21	18	51	16	14	30
4	4		28	28		19	9	46	9	7	15	2	9	20
	(25)	(25)	(25)	(25)	(24)	(32)	(34)	(28)	(43)	(44)	(41)	(43)	(43)	(40)
<i>deciding how you are to do the task</i>														
1	64	12	8	56	29	42	26.5	10	70.5	14	17	70	33	10
2	32	32	52	24	12.5	36	35	24	16	42	12	19	45	34
3	4	48	28	4	42	6	26.5	34.5	4.5	33	41.5	9	9.5	32
4		8	12	16	17	15	12	31	9	12	29	2	12	24
	(25)	(25)	(25)	(25)	(24)	(33)	(34)	(29)	(44)	(43)	(41)	(43)	(42)	(41)
<i>when you can have a break</i>														
1	60	24	16	20	21	23	31	11.5	65	16	22	58	31	24
2	20	8	24	16	4	3	9	4	14	30	24	26	31	27
3	8	20	8	8	17	10	6	4	9	35	29	9	17	24
4	12	48	52	56	58	63	53	81	12	19	24	7	21	24
	(25)	(25)	(25)	(25)	(24)	(30)	(32)	(26)	(43)	(43)	(48)	(43)	(42)	(41)
<i>when you start and finish your work</i>														
1	44	40	8	12	33	20	43	11.5	51	33	19	38	65	7
2	12	32	8	36	29	7	9	4	23	21	19	17	16	24
3	20	12	20	8	12.5	10	6		14	35	19	21	7	24
4	24	16	64	44	25	63	41	85	12	12	43	24	12	44
	(25)	(25)	(25)	(25)	(24)	(30)	(32)	(26)	(43)	(43)	(42)	(42)	(43)	(41)
<i>when to rotate between jobs</i>														
1	16	40	12			19	45.5	11	13	58.5	10			
2	32	32	28			6.5	18	7	21	22	20.5			
3	36	20	28			23	6	18.5	29	10	10			
4	16	8	32			52	30	63	37	10	59			
	(25)	(25)	(25)			(31)	(33)	(27)	(38)	(41)	(39)			
<i>setting output targets</i>														
1	12	76	8	12	67	7	48.5	7	24	54.5	12			
2	12	16	28	4	17	20	15	7	9.5	9	27			
3	76	4	36	84	4	27	15	7	21	16	15			
4		4	28		12.5	47	21	78	45	20.5	46			
	(25)	(25)	(25)	(25)	(24)	(30)	(33)	(27)	(42)	(44)	(41)			
<i>work allocation between team members</i>														
1	16	32	12			31	56	7	34	40	17	37	29	19.5
2	44	56	48			21	16	15	24	30	37	46	49	49
3	24	8	16			7	12.5	22	22	17.5	27	17	10	15
4	16	4	24			41	16	56	19.5	12.5	19.5		12	17
	(25)	(25)	(25)			(29)	(32)	(27)	(41)	(40)	(41)	(41)	(41)	(41)

Note: 1 a great deal; 2 a fair amount; 3 not much; 4 none at all.

**Table 5.7 Acquiring of skills and responsibilities through teamworking**

	AC (N)	AC (O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Acquiring of skills through teamworking / during recent years</i>					
yes	100	60	68	64	81
no		40	32	36	19
	(25)	(25)	(34)	(47)	(43)
<i>Skills developed through teamworking / during recent years</i>					
technical skills / knowledge of jobs and products	64	67	25	7	7
communication / people / social skills	16		50	57	40
team skills / working with others	8		5	7	7
man mgmt / leadership / delegation			20	27	27
problem-solving	4	33			
training	8				7
dealing with customers / queries				3	3
self development / building confidence					10
	(25)	(15)	(20)	(30)	(30)
<i>Acquiring of responsibilities through teamworking / during recent years</i>					
yes	84	56	34	45	58.5
no	16	44	66	55	41.5
	(25)	(25)	(32)	(47)	(41)
<i>Responsibilities developed through teamworking / during recent years</i>					
training / checking others work	9.5		22	5	27
technical / computers / machinery	14	29	11	10	
man mgmt / delegation / leadership			44	70	45.5
checking own quality & passing off / quickly	43	36			
product quality	19	36			
bigger work load / more jobs				10	23
meeting targets			11	11	
problem-solving			11	5	
health & safety	14				
service improvement / customer contact					4.5
	(21)	(14)	(9)	(20)	(22)

**Table 5.8 Effects of teamworking**

	AC(N)					NB				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
the variety of tasks in your job	28	60	12			11	35	50	4	
your level of control over how to do your job	16	52	28	4		11	33	43.5	11	2
your level of skill	28	64	8			13	61	26		
your level of responsibility	20	72	8			20	41	30	4	4
the effort required to perform your job	8	52	36	4		13	41	46		
the amount of pressure you feel under whilst doing your job	4	52	36	8		11	41	35	13	
your influence over quality	16	60	24			11	56.5	30	2	
your level of job satisfaction	32	44	24			6.5	52	26	9	6.5
	(25)					(46)				

Note: 1 greatly increased; 2 increased; 3 no effect; 4 decreased; 5 greatly decreased.

**Table 5.9 Support for continuation of teamworking**

	AC(N)	NB
<i>Feeling if QM strategy abandoned</i>		
very sorry	60	33
a bit sorry	20	10
wouldn't mind either way	20	35
would mildly prefer if they did		15
would much prefer if they did		6
	(25)	(48)
<i>Reasons for supporting continuation of QM strategy</i>		
teamworking / team spirit	37	6
be going backwards / waste of investment / been successful	32	37.5
sense of involvement / pride / responsibility	21	19
flexibility / variety of jobs	10.5	
open mgmt style / ability to question		19
attitude change across company		12.5
commitment to quality / service		6
	(19)	(16)
<i>Reasons for supporting abandoning of QM strategy</i>		
customer service has gone down due to staff shortages		30
too much too quickly / need basic training first		20
could learn from mistakes & get right next time		20
company don't value staff		10
company not telling truth		10
"vision" is a long way off		10
		(10)



**Table 5.10 Nature of problem-solving teamworking**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Problem-solving meetings</i>					
yes	100	56	74	91.5	100
no		44	26	8.5	
	(25)	(25)	(38)	(47)	(47)
<i>Nature of problem-solving meetings</i>					
quality circles / COI groups / QSATs	100	100	32	29	37
departmental meetings			4.5	10	39
ad hoc / informal meetings			4.5	10	9
Weds morning meetings / weekly meetings				44	2
general staff meetings				5	11
daily meetings / morning meetings			59		
internal quality meetings				2	
staff monthly meetings					2
	(25)	(12)	(22)	(41)	(46)
<i>Reason problem-solving meetings are held</i>					
only when a problem has been identified					
that needs addressing	48	75	25		7
on a regular basis regardless of whether					
a problem has been identified	52	25	75		93
	(25)	(12)	(32)		(45)
<i>Frequency of problem-solving meetings</i>					
once a day			57		
once every few days	4	8	3		2
once a week	13	33	7	24	36
once every few weeks	43.5	8	10	40.5	24
once a month	25		10	8	29
a few times a year	39	25	13	27	9
	(23)	(12)	(30)	(37)	(45)

**Table 5.11 Attendance at problem-solving meetings**

	AC (N)	AC (O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Frequency of attendance at problem-solving meetings</i>					
always	68	58	71	40.5	71
often	12	17	13	21	22
sometimes	12	8	3	24	4
rarely	4		6.5	2	
never	4	17	6.5	12	2
	(25)	(12)	(31)	(42)	(45)
<i>Reasons for often / rarely* attending problem-solving meetings</i>					
	<u>AC</u>	<u>OT</u>	<u>NB</u>	<u>HC</u>	
to know what's going on / to be kept informed	31	4	68	28	
involvement in discussing & solving problems / put own views	31	15		28	
because I'm a member / team leader / supervisor / part of job	14	15		19	
company policy / no choice / have to attend		42		17	
put under pressure to participate			12		
to get overtime pay (meetings held after work)			4		
because now we will be paid to attend				3	
*not everyone can go or production would stop / staff shortages	8	4	8	3	
*doesn't involve me / set group / not invited / not relevant to me	11	19	4		
*other commitments / pressure of work			4	3	
*as steward / section leader I don't always attend	6				
	(36)	(26)	(25)	(36)	

**Table 5.12 Pressure to attend problem-solving meetings**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>from work group or team</i>					
a great deal			8	5	17
a fair amount	12		11.5	39.5	28
not much	28		15	42	28
none at all	60	100	65	13	28
	(25)	(11)	(26)	(38)	(36)
<i>from other employees</i>					
a great deal			8	10.5	6
a fair amount			4	34	26
not much	20		15	37	29
none at all	80	100	73	18	40
	(25)	(11)	(26)	(38)	(35)
<i>from supervisor</i>					
a great deal	4		29	18	17
a fair amount	24		18	47	17
not much	24		18	21	34
none at all	48	100	36	13	31
	(25)	(11)	(28)	(38)	(35)
<i>from more senior mgmt</i>					
a great deal			31	32	20.5
a fair amount	16		24	40.5	23
not much	20	18	10	11	28
none at all	64	82	34.5	16	28
	(25)	(11)	(29)	(37)	(39)

**Table 5.13 Opinion of problem-solving teamworking**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Consideration given to problem-solving group ideas</i>					
a great deal of serious consideration	28	9	18	43	44
a reasonable amount of serious consideration	40	82	45.5	23	27
some consideration	28	9	33	32	27
not very much consideration	4		3	2	2
no consideration at all					
	(25)	(11)	(33)	(44)	(45)
<i>Problem-solving groups seen as a good thing</i>					
yes	96	100	82	95.5	98
no	4		18	4.5	2
	(25)	(11)	(34)	(44)	(45)
<i>Reasons for positive / negative* view of problem-solving groups</i>					
	<u>AC</u>	<u>OT</u>	<u>NB</u>	<u>HC</u>	
involvement in discussing & solving problems /					
improve quality of service & work environment	36	38	55	33	
chance to put forward opinions / grievances	25	28	26	29	
to know what's going on / be kept informed	17	3	5	21	
good for mgmt / worker communication	11	10	7	7	
creates team spirit		3	2	5	
makes job easier	8			2	
seen benefits / the way forward			2		
*same trivial problems / decisions already made	3	14	2	2	
*meetings held too often		3			
	(36)	(29)	(42)	(42)	

**Table 6.1 Informal suggestions**

	AC (N)	AC(O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Informal suggestions</i>					
yes	84	52	79	80	91.5
no	16	48	21	20	8.5
	(25)	(25)	(38)	(46)	(47)
<i>Changes as a result of suggestions</i>					
yes	81	71	74	74	67
no	19	29	26	26	33
	(21)	(14)	(31)	(38)	(42)
<i>Nature of changes</i>					
		<u>AC</u>	<u>OT</u>	<u>NB</u>	<u>HC</u>
production / process / work flow / work station					
lay out / operational / procedural		36	71	54	22
job specific changes		25	29	19	48
minor technical changes		39		8	17
restructuring for teamworking / training others				8	4
improved communication channels				8	
hygiene changes					4
trouble shooting					4
change in hours of work				4	
		(28)	(17)	(26)	(23)
<i>Willingness of management to listen to suggestions</i>					
more		64	79	72	60.5
little or no change		28	13	21	32
less		8	8	6	8
		(50)	(28)	(47)	(38)
<i>Consideration given to informal suggestions</i>					
	<u>AC(N)</u>	<u>AC(O)</u>	<u>OT</u>	<u>NB</u>	<u>HC</u>
a great deal of serious consideration	16	24	32	25	25
a reasonable amount of serious consideration	52	44	37	40	35
some consideration	28	32	26	31	29
not very much consideration	4		3	4	10
no consideration at all			3		
	(25)	(25)	(38)	(48)	(48)

**Table 6.2 Involvement in problem-solving and quality improvement**

	AC (N)	AC(O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Involvement in problem-solving</i>					
increased greatly	32	8	30	15	32.5
increased	52	36	38	50	40
not changed	16	48	27	33	27.5
decreased		8	3	2	
decreased greatly			3		
	(25)	(25)	(37)	(46)	(40)
<i>Reasons for increase / decrease* in problem-solving</i>					
		<u>AC</u>	<u>OT</u>	<u>NB</u>	<u>HC</u>
more responsibility / discretion / autonomy		12	36	53	12
COI groups / quality circles		45.5	14	10	48
more problems to solve / bigger job / more work		27	14	13	8
changed jobs		3	18	3	
more training / knowledge / experience			14	10	8
teamworking / helping others		9		3	12
empowerment					12
customer service				3	
more communication				3	
*received no further training			4.5		
*less time to be involved due to pressure of workload			3		
		(33)	(22)	(30)	(25)
<i>Amount of problem-solving related to quality improvement</i>					
a great deal		43	61	47	54
a fair amount		55	28	44	35
a small amount		2	8	7	8
hardly any				2	2
none at all			3		
		(49)	(36)	(45)	(48)
<i>Level of employee influence over quality</i>					
	<u>AC (N)</u>	<u>AC(O)</u>	<u>OT</u>	<u>NB</u>	<u>HC</u>
a great deal of influence	52	36	58	47	58
a fair degree of influence	36	52	28	25.5	23
some influence	12	12	11	25.5	19
hardly any influence at all			3	2	
no influence whatsoever					
	(25)	(25)	(36)	(47)	(48)

**Table 6.3 Opportunity for greatest degree of influence over quality**

Rank order	1	2	3	4	
<i>Auto Components (new shop)</i>					
by intervening personally to control what happens on the production line	40	24	12	24	(25)
by solving problems as they arise within the team	40	40	20		(25)
by putting forward ideas at COI meetings	20	28	24	28	(25)
by putting forward suggestions in a more informal way		8	44	48	(25)
<i>Auto Components (old shop)</i>					
by intervening personally to control what happens on the production line	37.5	12.5	17	33	(24)
by solving problems as they arise within the team	36	32	24	8	(25)
by putting forward ideas at COI meetings	25	37.5	46	33	(24)
by putting forward suggestions in a more informal way	4	17	46	33	(24)
<i>Office Tech</i>					
by intervening personally to control what happens on the production line	44	16	12	28	(25)
by solving problems as they arise within the team	50	21	18	11	(28)
by putting forward ideas at quality circle meetings	27	32	9	32	(22)
by putting forward suggestions in a more informal way	17	26	43.5	13	(23)
<i>New Bank</i>					
by personal contact with customers	76	4	13	7	(45)
by solving problems as they arise within the team	16	41	23	20.5	(44)
by putting forward ideas at QSAT meetings	14	32	29.5	25	(44)
by putting forward suggestions in a more informal way	21	33	46.5		(43)
<i>Hotel Co</i>					
by intervening personally at the customer interface	36	25	25	14	(36)
by solving problems as they arise within the team	40.5	30	24	5	(37)
by putting forward ideas at quality circle meetings	36	23	13	28	(39)
by putting forward suggestions in a more informal way	11	17	29	43	(35)

**Table 7.1 Effort levels**

	AC	OT	NB	HC
<i>Discussions over appropriate amount of effort</i>				
yes	54	40.5	38	62
no	46	59.5	62	38
	(50)	(37)	(47)	(47)
<i>Ideas normally different to managerial expectations</i>				
yes	70	53	23.5	34.5
no	30	47	76.5	65.5
	(27)	(17)	(17)	(29)
<i>Usual outcome of differences in view</i>				
mgmt don't know what jobs involve / operators know best	21	33	33	25
mgmt expect us to do more / usually do what we think is acceptable	42	67		50
usually discuss with mgmt & compromise	26		33	25
mgmt emphasise sales, but paperwork equally important			33	
	(19)	(6)	(3)	(4)

**Table 7.2 Changes in effort levels**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Sense of working harder than three years ago</i>					
yes	36	72	75.5	67	74
no	64	28	24	33	26
	(25)	(25)	(37)	(45)	(42)
<i>Ways in which working harder</i>					
more of the working day is spent actually working	33	11	22	4	7
the intensity with which each minute is worked					
has increased	11	61	22	36	28
both of these	56	28	56	61	65.5
	(9)	(18)	(27)	(28)	(29)
<i>Reasons for increase / decrease* in effort levels</i>					
	<u>AC</u>	<u>OT</u>	<u>NB</u>	<u>HC</u>	
less people doing more work / change in manning levels	15	20	57	22	
increase in production / workload / more responsibility	37	40	27	26	
necessity / to meet targets / meet customer demands	7	7	3	9	
technology dictates pace of work / machines speeded up	26	20			
more responsibility to deal with customers / hotel busier			7	17	
tighter limits to work to / less breaks / reduced setting times	15	7			
motivation has increased / more commitment					22
VIP			3		
more than one manager to report to			3		
*loss of orders / less production / motivation reduced		7			4
	(27)	(15)	(30)	(23)	



**Table 7.3 Reasons for working hard**

	AC	NB
<i>Need for working hard</i>		
yes	84	88
no	16	12
	(50)	(42)
<i>Reasons for necessity to work hard</i>		
to hit production schedules / sales & output targets / deadlines	41	28
to be efficient / personal progress and high standards	13	14
because it's my job / no one else will do it	5	14
to produce quality product to meet customer requirements	10	8
to achieve bonuses / get promoted / career progression	3	8
no alternative / machines dictate pace & flow of work	28	
to maintain job satisfaction		11
to avoid management criticism		6
because we're a service industry / customer pays wages		6
PMP		3
to compete with peers		3
	(39)	(36)
<i>Reasons why working hard is not necessary</i>		
automation makes job easier / requires less effort	80	
because I choose not to	20	
we would not need to if we had enough staff		100
	(5)	(3)

**Table 7.4 Influences on working hard**

	1	2	3	4	
<i>Auto Components</i>					
targets concerning output or volume	76	22	2		(50)
a machine or technology on the production line	60	30	10		(50)
clients or customers outside the workplace	54	34	6	6	(50)
a team leader	6	23	21	50	(48)
a supervisor	22	35	29	14	(49)
your fellow employees	20	40	18	22	(50)
your own discretion	62	30	6	2	(50)
pay incentives	24	30	18	28	(50)
reports and appraisals	2	31	22	45	(49)
<i>Office Tech</i>					
targets concerning output or volume	64	25	8	3	(36)
a machine or technology on the production line	32	41	15	12	(34)
clients or customers outside the workplace	54	14	14	17	(35)
a team leader	34	50	9	6	(32)
a supervisor	42	42	12	3	(33)
your fellow employees	22	39	31	8	(36)
your own discretion	67	19	11	3	(36)
pay incentives	23	31	26	20	(35)
reports and appraisals	42	31	19	8	(36)
<i>New Bank</i>					
targets concerning output or sales	37	39	24		(46)
a machine or technology in the branch	22	43.5	24	11	(46)
clients or customers outside the branch	52	33	13	2	(46)
a section head	22	59	15	4	(46)
your fellow employees	21	55	25.5	2	(47)
your own discretion	83	15		2	(47)
pay incentives	25.5	36	25.5	13	(47)
reports and appraisals	53	34	11	2	(47)
<i>Hotel Co</i>					
clients or customers	73	22	2	2	(45)
a supervisor	31	53	9	7	(45)
your fellow employees	27	51	16	7	(45)
your own discretion	78	18	2	2	(45)
pay incentives	24	29	22	24	(45)
reports and appraisals	42	36	13	9	(45)

Note: 1 an important influence; 2 some influence; 3 little influence; 4 no influence at all.

**Table 7.5 Enjoyment in working hard**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	NB	HC
<i>Enjoyment in working hard</i>				
yes	76	64	95	83
no	24	36	5	17
	(25)	(25)	(42)	(42)
<i>Reasons for enjoying working hard</i>				
	<u>AC</u>		<u>NB</u>	<u>HC</u>
pride & job satisfaction / rewarding & challenging	32		65	71
passes time / makes day go quicker	44		22.5	10
steady & structured work / keeps me busy	15		7.5	10
no one watching or supervising / work at own pace	6			3
no time to get bored / enjoy pressure	3			3
recognition				3
	(34)		(40)	(31)
<i>Negative aspects of working hard</i>				
boredom / monotony	66		11	7
high workload / fatigue & tiredness / long hours	17		22	50
causes stress / pressure to perform	6		36	14
lack of support & recognition from management			17	14
let down by customer complaints			3	7
machinery too old / breaks down	11			
less time with customers				7
slave to machine	6			
time scales / deadlines to meet			6	
office located on business park			3	
	(18)		(36)	(14)

**Table 7.6 Monitoring and surveillance**

	AC(N)	OT	NB	HC	
<i>Awareness of monitoring and surveillance</i>					
aware to a great extent	18	13.5	47	8	
aware to a reasonable extent	20	30	28	54	
aware to some extent	26	27	15	21	
not aware at all	36	30	11	17	
	(50)	(37)	(47)	(48)	
<i>Nature of monitoring and surveillance</i>					
	AC (N)	AC (O)	OT	NB	HC
mgmt & supervisor "over the shoulder" presence / spying	25	37.5	26	16	21
appraisal / performance monitoring / assessments	6		47	3	6
booking work onto computer / traceability / line speed	12.5	31	16		3
production targets to meet	19	12.5			
questions asked at end of line if work not done	19	12.5			
self-monitoring / having to record what I've done				13	9
SPC	12.5	6			
feedback from customer reports	6		5		
productivity mgmt stats / work measurement / time & motion				58	
supervisor & mgmt feedback / informal talking & remarks					27
QA checks / work lists / room checks					21
VIP				8	
test calls					6
engineer checking progress / QA checks			5		
management asking what I've done				3	
DMs					3
safety checks					3
	(16)	(16)	(19)	(38)	(33)

**Table 7.7 Changes in monitoring and surveillance**

	AC (N)	AC (O)	NB	HC
<i>Change in level of monitoring and surveillance</i>				
increased greatly	4	21	52	13
increased a fair amount	20	21	24	28
increased a little	20	8	6.5	13
no change	32	50	13	41
decreased a little	20			2
decreased a fair amount			5	
decreased greatly	4			2
	(25)	(24)	(46)	(39)
<i>Ways in which monitoring and surveillance has increased / decreased*</i>				
mgmt & supervisor "over the shoulder" presence / spying	12	18		9
questions asked at end of line if work not done	12	9	5	
booking work onto computer / traceability / line speed	12	54.5		
appraisal / performance monitoring			5	18
engineer checking progress / QA checks	12	9		
production targets to meet	6	9		
productivity mgmt stats / work measurement / time & motion			62	
QA checks / work lists / room checks				45.5
VIP			13.5	
SPC	12			
self-monitoring / having to record what I've done			11	
test calls				9
supervisor & mgmt feedback / informal talking & remarks				9
*not so much supervision / left to do job ourselves	35		3	9
	(17)	(11)	(37)	(11)

**Table 7.8 Other means of monitoring and surveillance**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	OT	HC
<i>Other means of monitoring and surveillance</i>				
yes	56	64	58	70.5
no	44	36	42	29.5
	(25)	(25)	(36)	(44)
<i>Nature of other means of monitoring and surveillance</i>				
enter quality on computer at specific times / everything				
logged in / mgmt see output / SPC / daily production				
figures / identification codes on parts	43	73	17	3
production schedules & targets	29	7	17	3
customer questionnaires & feedback / reject reports	14		39	28
mgmt ask questions at end of line	7	20	6	
assessment / appraisal			17	14
mgmt talk to supervisors / other staff	7			10
management checking work				17
self-checking lists				14
spying			6	
test calls				3
occupancy figures				3
weekly hotel inspections				3
	(14)	(15)	(18)	(29)

**Table 7.9 Stress resulting from monitoring**

	NB
<i>Stress as a result of monitoring</i>	
yes	44
no	56
	(43)
<i>Ways in which monitoring causes stress</i>	
having to do set amount of work / pressure to meet targets / time pressures	50
can work hard but stats don't show it / in trouble if stats are bad	17
threat of no pay rise / threat to job prospects	17
mistakes get noticed more now / even small mistakes	11
feeling of being watched / not trusted	6
	(18)

**Table 7.10 Pressure from team members**

	AC (N)	AC (O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Pressure from team members / other workers on production line</i>					
always	8	8	8		4
sometimes	44	12	25	30	32
rarely	24	20	44	50	45
never	24	60	22	20	19
	(25)	(25)	(36)	(46)	(47)
<i>Nature of pressure from team members / other workers</i>					
general pressure to go along with majority / work faster	31	50	43	42	53
fear of criticism / make you look foolish if make a mistake	23		43	8	13
pressure to set machine & leave it in same way as others	23	25	14		7
other team members saying how job should be done	15	25		17	13
remind you of output targets / competitiveness within team	8			25	13
being given more work by manager				8	
	(13)	(4)	(7)	(12)	(15)

**Table 7.11 Pressure from technology**

	AC (N)	AC (O)	OT	NB
<i>Pressure from technology</i>				
always	12	12.5	11	6.5
sometimes	28	29	13.5	17
rarely	28	8	27	52
never	32	50	49	24
	(25)	(24)	(37)	(46)
<i>Nature of pressure from technology</i>				
influences & sets pace of work & when breaks can be taken / sets line speed	60	82	60	60
pressure to use technology in right way / same way as others	20	18	20	30
pressure to get used to new technology	20		20	
initial greater workload				10
	(10)	(11)	(5)	(10)

**Table 7.12 Nature of pressure and stress**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Frequency of pressure or stress</i>					
constantly, during every day	8	8	3	8.5	11
very often	4	8	11	19	23
often		8	25	15	17
sometimes	52	36	42	49	38
rarely	32	20	11	6	8.5
never	4	20	8	2	2
	(25)	(25)	(36)	(47)	(47)
<i>Nature of pressure or stress</i>					
volume of work required				35	
pressure to meet deadlines / time pressure / feeling of falling behind				35	
pressure to sell products / meet sales targets				12.5	
staff shortages				5	
PMP forms				5	
tiredness				5	
verbal abuse to colleagues				2.5	
				(40)	



**Table 7.13 Strictness of discipline**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Strictness of discipline</i>					
more strict	12	16	58	27	22.5
little or no change	60	68	19	51	52.5
less strict	28	16	22	22	25
	(25)	(25)	(36)	(45)	(40)
<i>Issues over which management have become more / less strict</i>					
<u>absenteeism</u>					
more strict	40	68	83	53	58
no change	20	27	10	42	29
less strict	40	4.5	7	4	12.5
	(10)	(22)	(30)	(45)	(24)
<u>persistent lateness</u>					
more strict	50	68	72	41	67
no change	20	27	21	52	17
less strict	30	4.5	7	7	17
	(10)	(22)	(29)	(44)	(24)
<u>poor quality work</u>					
more strict	60	64	73	68	76
no change	30	23	20	23	8
less strict	10	14	7	9	16
	(10)	(22)	(30)	(44)	(25)
<u>negative attitudes to work</u>					
more strict				67	
no change				24	
less strict				9	
				(45)	

**Table 7.14 Pay**

	AC (N)	AC (O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Pay linked to performance</i>					
yes	16	32	46	89	22
no	84	68	54	11	78
	(25)	(25)	(37)	(47)	(46)
<i>Ways in which pay is linked to performance</i>					
bonus if work harder / linked to production / flexibility	25	80	15	7.5	25
assessment / appraisals / VIP / bad report means no					
pay rise / linked to quality and absenteeism			69	82.5	75
higher rate for multi-skilled / had upgrading	50	20	15		
getting good wage whilst training for new job	25				
no pay rise if don't sell / sales targets				10	
	(4)	(5)	(13)	(40)	(4)
<i>Extent to which pay is a motivation</i>					
a very large extent	44	40	19	11	7
a fairly large extent	28	36	17	38	29
to some extent	20	24	33	38	24
hardly at all	8		31	13	40
	(25)	(25)	(36)	(47)	(40)
<i>Other sources of motivation (greater or lesser than pay)</i>					
sense of involvement / pride / team spirit	8	29	40	39.5	39
job satisfaction (more)	4	8	4	16	6
job satisfaction (less)	40	21		2	3
nothing else	28	33	4	2	
job satisfaction (equal)	8		32	14	22
hitting targets / pressure from mgmt	4		16	19	11
being well trained / promotion prospects			4	7	2
job security (more)	8	8			
meeting people / +ve comments from guests					17
	(25)	(24)	(25)	(43)	(36)
<i>Comparability of pay with other firms</i>					
a lot better than most		17		4	7
a bit better	4	12.5	3	13	16
about average	48	50	60	43	53
a little worse than average	48	17	26	34	20
a lot worse than average		4	11	6	4
	(25)	(24)	(25)	(47)	(45)

**Table 7.15 Appraisal**

	AC(N)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Methods used for appraising performance</i>				
merit / quality of work / overall performance		7	7	5
not aware / not sure / don't know / no idea	39			10
none / only staff are appraised	22	4		
annual appraisal / annual report			14	62
guess work / word of mouth		11		5
target setting / sales targets		4	9.5	
6 monthly assessment / other assessments		74		
VIP			67	
bonus scheme / profit sharing	22			
training programmes / exam at end of training	17			
customer feedback				8
employee of the quarter / theatre tickets etc.				8
monthly appraisal				3
accuracy in job			2	
	(23)	(27)	(42)	(39)
<i>Satisfaction with appraisal</i>				
very satisfied	11	14	11	29
fairly satisfied	44	36	50	62
not very satisfied	44	39	33	7
not at all satisfied		11	6.5	2
	(9)	(36)	(46)	(42)
<i>Reasons for dissatisfaction with appraisal</i>				
skills not recognised	33	15		100
bonus based on whole factory / individual not recognised	67	46	6	
not properly implemented / staff not sure how it works		8	62.5	
bias in management attitudes		15	6	
grades not wide enough / remain average / have to be				
very good or very bad to be noticed		8	6	
too much emphasis on achieving sales			12.5	
no pay rise if fail on attendance or quality		8		
cost limit with VIP / defeats object of appraisal			6	
	(3)	(13)	(16)	(1)

**Table 8.1 Trade union membership**

	NB
<i>Membership of trade union</i>	
yes	47
no	53
	(47)
<i>Name of trade union</i>	
BIFU	56.5
NWSA	43.5
	(23)
<i>Reasons for not being in a trade union</i>	
do not benefit me / no help at all	33
subs are too high / waste of money	25
unions are weak / bank does what it wants to anyway	25
why pay to be in union when you get pay rise anyway	8
with two unions, bank can divide and rule	4
I am employed to work for the bank	4
	(24)

**Table 8.2 Effect of new working practices on trade unions**

	AC	NB
<i>Effect of new working practices on union/s</i>		
made union/s stronger	6	4
no change	84	78
made union/s weaker	10	18
	(50)	(45)
<i>Ways in which new working practices have made union/s stronger / weaker*</i>		
unions make jobs more secure / always have a say	29	20
*union can't control new working practices / undermined by them / can't change employer strategy if determined	43	60
*with teams don't need union to sort out problems	29	
*the "vision" lessens need for a union		20
	(7)	(10)
<i>Management intention to undermine role of union/s</i>		
yes	14	30
no	86	70
	(50)	(40)
<i>Reasons for trying / not trying* to undermine union/s</i>		
would suit mgmt to get rid of union / to reduce oppositional power	8.5	17
*union so weak mgmt don't need to do this	13	33
*good working relationship between mgmt & union / rep is like a manager	32	11
*mgmt not seeking conflict / happy with union role / see union as asset	28	17
*obviously not trying to do this	8.5	6
*unions never discussed by mgmt / don't figure in mgmt plans		17
*doing it for business / competitive reasons	11	
	(47)	(18)

**Table 8.3 Role of trade unions in new working practices**

	AC	NB
<i>Union/s role in determining nature of working practices / the "vision"</i>		
a very significant role	10	
a fairly significant role	30	7
neither a significant nor an insignificant role	32	40
a fairly insignificant role	24	20
a very insignificant role	4	33
	(50)	(45)
<i>Most significant union/s role</i>		
general involvement in discussions	53	67
fairness for workers / representation of members	16	33
pay & grade changes for multi-skilled jobs	21	
women's rights / maternity	5	
involvement in courses	5	
	(19)	(3)
<i>Reasons for insignificant union/s role</i>		
not strong enough / no influence on mgmt / changes		
would happen anyway	54	68
union didn't want to get involved / not enough input	38.5	32
not enough communication / union meetings	8	
	(13)	(19)

**Table 8.4 Changing nature of trade union influence**

	AC	NB
<i>Success of union in representing employee interests</i>		
very successful	8	2
successful	36	6
moderately successful	48	32
not very successful	8	47
unsuccessful		13
	(50)	(47)
<i>Influence of union/s compared with five years ago</i>		
far higher		
somewhat higher	12	2
about the same	72	64
somewhat lower	14	30
far lower	2	4
	(50)	(47)
<i>Ways in which union influence has increased / decreased*</i>		
more involved with shop floor / more sensible union position	23	
negotiating pay / mgmt listen to union / joint process	15	
*union has lost power / changes happen anyway	46	58
*unemployment and labour market undermines union	15	17
*staff fear reprisals if they get involved with union		17
*unions compete with each other too much		8
	(13)	(12)

**Table 8.5 Levels of trade union influence**

	1	2	3	4	
<i>Auto Components</i>					
individual union members within the plant	16	38	26	20	(50)
the union convenor at the plant	48	38	14		(50)
the local branch of the union	2	18	41	39	(50)
the union at national level	4	24	32	40	(50)
<i>New Bank</i>					
individual union members within offices	13	11	35	41	(46)
the union rep at the branch / office	6.5	17	48	28	(46)
the local offices of the union	6.5	41	28	24	(46)
the union/s at national level	35	39	15	11	(46)

Note: 1 a great deal of influence; 2 some influence; 3 little influence; 4 none at all.

**Table 8.6 Best channels for representing employees' interests**

	union	mgmt	both	yourself	
<i>Auto Components</i>					
pay	44	12	42	2	(50)
job security	10	19	56	15	(48)
overtime	6	60	16	18	(50)
re-deployment between jobs	7	49	28	16	(43)
the way work is organised	2	63	16	18	(49)
the pace of work	6	14	10	70	(50)
the intensity of work	6	20	8	66	(50)
<i>New Bank</i>					
pay	27	23	32	18	(44)
job security	11	27	29.5	32	(44)
overtime	5	49	9	37	(43)
re-deployment between jobs		69	13	18	(45)
the way work is organised		43.5	2	54	(46)
the pace of work	2	33	2	63	(46)
the intensity of work	2	50	2	45.5	(44)

**Table 8.7 Desirability of trade union recognition**

	OT
<i>Beneficial if company recognised trade union</i>	
yes	28
no	72
	(29)
<i>Reasons why it would be good / bad* if company recognised trade union</i>	
company couldn't implement unpopular changes / get away with less	12
workers exploited / vulnerable / union would back them up	12
would feel happier with a union / ensure fairness	4
*operate OK without one / unions a waste of time /	
not necessary / have good procedures	48
*be on strike all time / can be too militant & disruptive	24
	(25)
<i>Likelihood of joining union if recognised</i>	
yes	32
no	68
	(25)
<i>Reasons for joining / not joining* union if recognised</i>	
would support workforce / solve problems	26
*not necessary / don't need one / good relationship already	47
*don't agree with unions	26
	(19)



**Table 9.1 Training**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Training</i>					
yes	100	76	100	94	92
no		24		6	8
	(25)	(25)	(39)	(48)	(48)
<i>Amount of training per year</i>					
a few days	8	47	26	32	17
one week	12	10.5	18	15	12
two weeks	20	21	5	25.5	12
one month	12	10.5	15	13	9.5
over one month	48	10.5	36	15	50
	(25)	(19)	(39)	(47)	(42)
<i>Nature of training</i>					
on - the - job		68	28	17	17
off - the - job		10.5	5	6	9
both	100	21	67	77	74
	(25)	(19)	(39)	(47)	(46)

**Table 9.2 Reasons for training**

<hr/>		
<i>Auto Components (new shop)</i>		
to learn the basic job you were recruited for	100	(24)
to add further skills to that basic job	100	(23)
to work with new technology or equipment in the job	100	(25)
to work with new methods, systems or procedures	100	(24)
to prepare you for your present job in teams by		
developing team spirit	100	
to achieve higher quality standards in the job	100	(23)
to learn new safety procedures	100	(22)
<i>Auto Components (old shop)</i>		
to learn the basic job you were recruited for	54	(13)
to add further skills to that basic job	61.5	(13)
to work with new technology or equipment in the job	81	(16)
to work with new methods, systems or procedures	69	(16)
to achieve higher quality standards in the job	71	(14)
to learn new safety procedures	50	(12)
<i>Office Tech</i>		
to learn the basic job you were recruited for	64	(39)
to add further skills to that basic job	72	(39)
to work with new technology or equipment in the job	59	(39)
to work with new methods, systems or procedures	72	(39)
to prepare you for your present job in teams by		
developing team spirit	20.5	(39)
to achieve higher quality standards in the job	64	(39)
to learn new safety procedures	36	(39)
<i>New Bank</i>		
to learn the basic job you were recruited for		
to add further skills to that basic job	85	(47)
to work with new technology or equipment in the job	81	(47)
to work with new methods, systems or procedures	72	(47)
to prepare you for your present job in teams by		
developing team spirit	32	(47)
to achieve higher quality standards in the job	60	(47)
to learn new safety procedures	9	(46)
<i>Hotel Co</i>		
to learn the basic job you were recruited for	70	(46)
to add further skills to that basic job	80	(45)
to work with new technology or equipment in the job	71	(45)
to work with new methods, systems or procedures	76	(45)
to prepare you for your present job in teams by		
developing team spirit	64	(45)
to achieve higher quality standards in the job	93	(45)
to learn new safety procedures	74	(46)
<hr/>		

**Table 9.3 Adequacy of training**

	AC (N)	AC (O)	OT	NB	HC
<i>Most important reason for training</i>					
to learn the basic job you were recruited for	16	21	15		22
to add further skills to that basic job	16	26	21	36	11
to work with new technology or equipment in the job	28	16	15	16	3
to work with new methods, systems or procedures	8	16	6	16	3
to prepare you for your present job in teams by developing team spirit	12		6	7	11
to achieve higher quality standards in the job	16	16	33	25	46
to learn new safety procedures	4	5	3		5
	(25)	(19)	(33)	(44)	(37)
<i>Adequacy of training</i>					
more than adequate	8	26	33	25.5	65
adequate but nothing more	40	68	59	55	28
barely adequate	44	5	5	17	4
not at all adequate	8		3	2	2
	(25)	(19)	(39)	(47)	(46)
<i>Weaknesses in training</i>					
not enough depth / too basic & idealistic / mgmt fad	17	42	29	26	54
not enough time spent / not frequent enough	17	25	23.5	35.5	23
not always relevant to job	4	17	6	6.5	15
production targets always come first / training sidelined / mgmt say not but it is	56.5	8	6		
trainers not skilled enough / learn job from paper not by doing it / too busy to help	4	8	29		
staff shortages cause time constraints on training				23	8
my hours restrict my access to training			6	3	
takes place too late				6.5	
	(23)	(12)	(17)	(31)	(13)
<i>Change in level of training</i>					
increased	76	45.5	49	41	63
little or no change	20	54.5	38.5	25	29
decreased	4		13	34	8
	(25)	(22)	(39)	(44)	(38)

**Table 9.4 Level of job security**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	OT	NB	HC
very high	32	36	45	4	28
high	52	48	39.5	21	47
moderate	16	16	16	57	23
low				8.5	2
very low				8.5	
	(25)	(25)	(38)	(47)	(47)

**Table 9.5 Reasons for feeling high/low\* level of job security**

	AC	OT	NB	HC
company is successful / full order book / confidence in mgmt	29	6	2	32
have experience / long service / good at my job	10	3	12	29
highly skilled / trained in skills company needs / do important job	33		5	11
willing to adapt & be flexible	4		7	4
product quality / making what customer wants	8	6		
policy of "no redundancies"		66		
management have tried to avoid redundancies				14
management				4
few recent redundancies			2	
plenty of overtime gives security	2			
*redundancies have occurred / no job is safe / competitive market	14	12.5	59.5	4
*job devalued / no career structure			2	4
*lack of training		3	2	
*part-time staff always get left behind			5	
*decreasing demand for product		3		
*pressure as sales targets get too high			2	
	(49)	(32)	(42)	(28)

**Table 9.6 Correlations with perceived job security**

	Correlation	Probability	
Degree of loyalty to company	.4130	.000	(181)
Extent to which in favour of changes when first introduced	.2657	.000	(178)
Extent to which in favour of changes now	.2598	.013	(91)
Degree of consideration given by mgmt to informal suggestions	.2539	.001	(182)
Level of problem-solving	.2196	.004	(172)
Adequacy of training	.2048	.007	(173)
Degree of consideration given by mgmt to ideas from problem-solving teams	.2012	.012	(156)
Extent to which communication increases trust	.2011	.007	(181)
Satisfaction with appraisal	.2001	.021	(132)
Level of influence over quality	.1932	.009	(180)
Overall level of trust	.1849	.013	(181)
Importance of quality improvement	.1668	.025	(181)

Note: Pearson's parametric correlation test was applied. As the "probability" column indicates, all correlations are significant at the 5% level.

**Table 9.7 Change in level of job satisfaction**

	AC(N)	AC(O)	NB	HC
more satisfied	79	60	36	58.5
little or no change	17	32	16	34
less satisfied	4	8	48	7
	(24)	(25)	(44)	(41)

**Table 9.8 Cross-tabulation of job satisfaction with perceived job security**

		Job Satisfaction		
		more	no change	less
Job Security	very high	21	7	1
	high	38	12	3
	moderate	13	14	15
	low			5
	very low	1		3

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## **APPENDIX ONE:**

### **PROFILE OF INTERVIEWEES AND QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONDENTS**

#### **Job titles of management interviewees**

##### Auto Components

Production Manager  
Manufacturing Manager  
Engineering Manager  
Quality Manager  
Training and Safety Officer  
Finance Manager  
Sales Manager  
+ Union Convenor

##### Office Tech

Production Manager  
General Manager  
Personnel Director  
Senior Personnel Officer  
Purchasing and Logistics Manager  
Finance Manager

##### New Bank

Quality Service Co-ordinator (regional office)  
Manager (branch banking)  
Assistant Lending Manager (branch banking)  
Assistant Customer Services Manager (branch banking)  
Assistant Services Unit Manager (branch banking)  
Manager (lending centre)  
Assistant Manager (business centre)

##### Hotel Co

General Manager (full-service)  
General Manager (full-service)  
Personnel and Training Manager (full-service)  
Resident Manager (full-service)  
Front Desk Manager (full-service)  
Housekeeping Manager (full-service)  
General Manager (limited-facility)  
General Manager (limited-facility)  
Assistant General Manager (limited-facility)  
Assistant General Manager (limited-facility)

## Questionnaire respondents

### Sex

	Male	Female	
Auto Components	42	8	(50)
Office Tech	26	14	(40)
New Bank	19	29	(48)
Hotel Co	19	30	(49)

### Age group

	16-20	21-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	55+	
Auto Components		2	13	16	15	4	(50)
Office Tech		16	17	3	4		(40)
New Bank	1	14	25	7	1		(48)
Hotel Co	10	17	16	5	1		(49)

### Length of time in company (years)

	< 1	1 - 4	5 - 10	11 - 20	> 21	
Auto Components		5	22	14	9	(50)
Office Tech		17	23			(40)
New Bank	2	6	18	19	3	(48)
Hotel Co	11	33	3	2		(49)

### Length of time in current department (years)

	1 yr	1 - 3	4 - 6	6 yrs	
Auto Components	6	22	8	14	(50)
Office Tech	3	10	19	8	(40)
New Bank	27	15	6		(48)
Hotel Co	17	25	5	2	(49)

## Job titles

### *Auto Components*

Multi-skilled Operator (SVG / SVS lines)	25
Press Tool Setter / Operator	8
Grinder	3
Machine Setter / Operator	2
Loader	2
Quality Controller	2
Quality Inspector	1
Miller	1
Inspector	1
Operator (valve guides)	1
Press Operator	1
Side Face Grinder	1
Setter (valve guides)	1
Stacker	1
	<hr/> 50

### *Office Tech*

Assembly Operator (main line)	19
Supervisor (main line)	5
Quality Assurance Engineer (quality control)	4
Inspector (quality control)	4
Assembly Operator (B line)	3
Assembly Operator (drum manufacturing)	2
Operations Assistant (systems)	1
Quality Systems Developer (quality control)	1
Material Warehouseman (warehouse)	1
	<hr/> 40

### *New Bank*

Lending Officer (lending centre)	9
Managers Assistant (business centre)	9
Customer Service Officer (branch banking)	8
Lending Officers Assistant (lending centre)	5
Cashier (branch banking)	3
Loans Officer (branch banking)	3
Business Lending Assistant (business centre)	3
Accounts Officer (branch banking)	2
Receptionist / Secretary (business centre)	2
Small Business Adviser (branch banking)	1
Secretary (branch banking)	1
Personal Financial Advisor (lending centre)	1
Typist (business centre)	1
	<hr/>
	48

### *Hotel Co*

Guest Service Assistant (front desk / reception)	9
Chef (kitchen)	7
Guest Service Assistant (housekeeping)	4
Sales Assistant (sales)	4
Accounts Assistant (accounts)	3
Maintenance Engineer (maintenance)	3
Conference Assistant (conferences & banqueting)	3
Waitress (restaurant)	3
Steward (kitchens)	2
Breakfast Supervisor (food & beverage)	2
Food Service Assistant (food & beverages)	1
Trainee (food & beverage)	1
Barman (food & beverages)	1
Housekeeper (housekeeping)	1
Assistant Housekeeper (housekeeping)	1
Night Porter (front of house)	1
Porter (front of house / reception)	1
Personnel Assistant (personnel)	1
Leisure Assistant (leisure club)	1
	<hr/>
	49



## APPENDIX TWO:

### THE EMPLOYEE QUESTIONNAIRE

(This is a list of all the questions that were asked across all four case study organisations. As explained in the text, some questions were not asked at all companies, and the precise wording of some questions also varied between companies)

#### Introduction

1. *Sex*

male / female

2. *Age group*

16-20 / 21-25 / 26-35 / 36-45 / 46-55 / 55+

3. *How long have you worked in this company?*

less than a year / 1-4 years / 5-10 years / 11-20 years / more than 21 years

4. *How long have you worked in this particular department?*

less than a year / 1-3 years / 4-6 years / more than 6 years

#### Teamworking

5. *Do you usually work on your own or does your work usually involve working with other employees in a group or team?*

individually / in a team

6. *If yes: Is this because*

management requires you to work in teams / employees help one another regardless of management's intentions / both?

7. *What would you define as constituting your "team"?*

8. *If individually, do you prefer this way of working, or would you rather work in a team?*

prefer working individually / would prefer to be in a team

9. *Did you have a choice whether or not to go into teams?*

yes / no

10. *If yes: Why did you choose to do so?*

11. *In the course of a regular working day do you*

usually work with one particular work group / sometimes move from one work group to another / often move from one work group to another?

12. *Is there a sense of teamwork in your work area?*

yes / no

13. *Is the sense of teamwork in your group*

very strong / fairly strong / neither strong nor weak / fairly weak / very weak?

14. *Over the last three years, has the sense of teamwork in your work group*

increased / decreased / little or no change?

15. *If there are problems with the job, would you say that the people in your work group help each other out*

always / sometimes / rarely / never?

16. *Has the nature of teamwork changed over the last three years?*

yes / no

17. *If yes: In what way?*
18. *If not: For what reasons?*
19. *When your supervisor is assigning work, is it assigned to the work group, who then decide who does what within the group / assigned to each individual worker?*
20. *Over the last three years, would you say the responsibility of your work group for organising the way work is carried out has increased / decreased / stayed much the same?*
21. *On the following scale - 1 a great deal, 2 a fair amount, 3 not much, 4 none at all - what amount of influence do yourself, your supervisor and your work group have over the following:*  
the pace at which you work / deciding what tasks you are to do / deciding how you are to do the task / when you can have a break / when you start and finish your work / when to rotate between jobs / setting output targets / work allocation between team members?
22. *Has working in teams required you to develop more skills?*  
yes / no
23. *If yes: What are these?*
24. *Has working in teams required you to take on board any extra responsibilities?*  
yes / no
25. *If yes: What are these?*
26. *On the following scale - 1 greatly increased, 2 increased, 3 no effect, 4 decreased, 5 greatly decreased - could you say what effect teamworking, as a specific issue, has had upon the following:*  
the variety of tasks in your job / your level of control over how to do your job / your level of skill / your level of responsibility / the effort required to perform your job / the amount of pressure you feel under whilst doing your job / your influence over quality / your level of job satisfaction?
27. *If management decided to give up teamworking (or new working practices) and return to the old form of work organisation, would you be very sorry / a bit sorry / wouldn't mind either way / would mildly prefer if they did / would much prefer if they did?*
28. *If CODE 1 OR 2: Why? What would you miss?*
29. *If CODE 4 OR 5: Why?*

### Training

30. *Over the last five years have you received any training?*  
yes / no
31. *On average, about how much training do you think you have received per-year during this time?*  
a few days / one week / two weeks / one month / over one month
32. *Was the training on-the-job / off-the-job / both?*
33. *What was the purpose of this training? (yes/no)*  
to learn the basic job you were recruited for / to add further skills to that basic job / to work with new technology or equipment in the job / to work with new methods, systems or

- procedures / to prepare you for your present job in teams by developing team spirit / to achieve higher quality standards in the job / to learn new safety procedures
34. *Of these reasons, which do you feel was the most important?*
35. *How adequate or sufficient do you feel the level of training provided has been for these purposes?*  
more than adequate / adequate but nothing more / barely adequate / not at all adequate
36. *If CODE 2, 3 OR 4: Why is this? Where are the weaknesses?*
37. *Thinking back five years, has the level of training which you receive increased / decreased / little or no change?*
38. *How long would it take to train someone to do your work?*  
a few hours / a few days / a few weeks / 1 month-3 months / 3 months-6 months / 6 months-a year / more than a year
39. *What level of confidence do you have in your own ability to perform your current job?*  
a great deal / a fair amount / a little / not much / none at all
40. *Why is this?*
41. *Has your level of confidence in your own abilities changed over the last two years?*  
yes / no
42. *If yes: In what ways?*
43. *What level of confidence do you have that the bank has in place adequate means of developing the competencies you need to perform your job?*  
a great deal / a fair amount / a little / not much / none at all
44. *If CODE 3, 4 OR 5: Why is this? Where are the weaknesses?*

#### Employee involvement and communication

45. *Do you ever have meetings where you can put forward suggestions for solving particular problems within your work area?*  
yes / no
46. *What kind of meetings are these? Describe*
47. *Do these meetings take place*  
only when a problem has been identified that needs addressing / on a regular basis regardless of whether a problem has been identified?
48. *How often are these meetings held?*  
once a day / once every few days / once a week / once every few weeks / once a month / a few times a year
49. *How often do you attend?*  
always / often / sometimes / rarely / never
50. *Why is that?*
51. *On the following scale - 1 a great deal, 2 a fair amount, 3 not much, 4 none at all - are you put under any pressure to attend these meetings by*  
your work group or team / other employees / your supervisor / more senior management?
52. *What degree of consideration do you think management give to the ideas which come from these meetings?*  
a great deal of serious consideration / a reasonable amount of serious consideration / some consideration / not very much consideration / no consideration at all
53. *Broadly speaking, do you think these meetings are a good thing?*  
yes / no
54. *Why is that?*

55. *Over the last year have you ever made informal suggestions to the people you work with, or to any supervisor or manager, about ways of improving the efficiency with which work is carried out?*

yes / no

56. *Did anything change as a result of your suggestions?*

yes / no

57. *If yes: Describe the changes*

58. *Over the last five years has management become more eager or less eager to listen to your suggestions?*

more / less / little or no change

59. *What degree of consideration do you think management give to suggestions which are put forward informally by workers?*

a great deal of serious consideration / a reasonable amount of serious consideration / some consideration / not very much consideration / no consideration at all

60. *Compared with five years ago, would you say management now communicates with workers*

a great deal more / a little more / hardly any difference / not as much?

61. *On the following scale - 1 very successful, 2 moderately successful, 3 of little use, 4 of no use at all - which methods of communication with employees do you find most useful?*

notice boards / company newsletters / procedural circulars / staff-related circulars / team briefings / communications meetings / MDs address / quarterly meeting / director's briefings /

video communications / informal communications

62. *To what extent do you feel that these forms of communication increase the level of trust between management and employees?*

a very large extent / a fairly large extent / some extent / not at all

### Quality improvement

63. *How important, in your judgement, is the concept of "quality improvement" within the company?*

it is the single most important issue in the company today / very important / fairly important / of some importance / not very important / of no importance

64. *If CODE 1, 2, 3 OR 4: Why is this, and what do you mean by "quality improvement"?*

65. *To what extent do you feel your level of involvement in problem-solving has changed over the last five years?*

increased greatly / increased / not changed / decreased / decreased greatly

66. *If increased / decreased: In what ways? And why?*

67. *How much of this problem-solving activity is geared towards improvements in quality?*

a great deal / a fair amount / a small amount / hardly any / none at all

68. *What level of influence would you say workers have over quality within the company?*

a great deal of influence / a fair degree of influence / some influence / hardly any influence at all / no influence whatsoever

69. *In what way do you feel you can have the most influence on quality within the company? (Rank order 1-4)*

by intervening personally to control what happens on the production line / by solving problems as they arise within the team / by putting forward ideas at quality circle meetings / by putting forward suggestions in a more informal way

Reactions to the quality improvement programme

70. *When the changes in work organisation were being introduced, were you strongly in favour / slightly in favour / neither opposed nor in favour / slightly opposed / strongly opposed?*

71. *If opposed or in favour: For what reasons?*

72. *Has your opinion of the changes in work organisation changed over the last three years?*

yes / no

73. *If yes: Are you now*

*a lot more supportive of the changes / more supportive / less supportive / a lot less supportive?*

74. *If more / less: Why is this?*

75. *What do you think of the overall level of trust that exists between management and workers here? Would you say there is complete trust / trust most of the time / a fair amount of trust / not much trust / no trust at all?*

76. *Over the last five years, has workers' trust in management increased / decreased / stayed the same?*

77. *If CODE 1 OR 2: Why is this?*

78. *On the following scale - 1 it is built in to everything that workers do, 2 there is a very high level of awareness, 3 there is a fairly high level of awareness, 4 there is some awareness, 5 there is little awareness, 6 there is no awareness at all - how aware are workers of the following ideas within the company?*

*quality / continuous improvement / customer satisfaction / internal and external customers / employee empowerment / total quality management / changing work culture*

79. *Do you think that further changes are likely here in the near future?*

yes / no

80. *If yes: What sort of changes do you think will occur?*

81. *And are you supportive of them?*

yes / no / indifferent

82. *If yes / no: For what reasons?*

83. *How would you describe the level of job security which you feel you have within the company?*

*very high / high / moderate / low / very low*

84. *Why is this?*

85. *Generally speaking, over the last five years at work have you become more satisfied / less satisfied / little or no change?*

86. *If CODE 1 OR 2: On the following scale - 1 to a very large extent, 2 to a large extent, 3 to some extent, 4 not at all - to what extent have the following factors contributed to this change?*

*teamworking / new technology / training / involvement in quality circle groups / pay levels / job security*

87. *On the following scale - 1 of paramount importance, 2 very important, 3 fairly important, 4 of some importance, 5 of little importance, 6 not important at all - upon which factors do you consider the success of the company most depends?*

*the efforts of individual employees / the efforts of managers / use of the latest technology / methods of ensuring consistent quality / the ability to compete on price / economic factors beyond the company's control*

88. *How much loyalty do you feel towards the company?*  
a great deal / a fair amount / a little / hardly any / none at all

Effort levels, monitoring and surveillance, and discipline

89. *Do you ever discuss with other workers in your group the idea of what is an appropriate amount of effort to put into one's work?*

yes / no

90. *If yes: Are these ideas normally different from managerial expectations?*

yes / no

91. *If yes: How are they different? And what is the usual outcome?*

92. *Are you working harder than you were three years ago?*

yes / no

93. *If yes: In what ways are you working harder? Is it that more of the working day is spent actually working / the intensity with which each minute is worked has increased / both of these?*

94. *Why do you think there has been a change in effort levels?*

95. *Do you feel it is necessary to work this hard?*

yes / no

96. *If yes: Why is it necessary?*

97. *If no: Why not?*

98. *Do you enjoy working this hard?*

yes / no

99. *If yes: Why is it enjoyable?*

100. *And what are the non-enjoyable / negative aspects?*

101. *On the following scale - 1 an important influence, 2 has some influence, 3 has little influence, 4 has no influence at all - how important do you think are the following in determining how hard you work?*

targets concerning output or volume / a machine or technology on the production line / clients or customers outside the workplace / a team leader / a supervisor / your fellow employees / your own discretion / pay incentives / reports and appraisals

102. *How difficult would it be for you to work harder than you are at present?*

very difficult / quite difficult / neither difficult nor easy / quite easy / very easy

103. *To what extent are you aware of being subject to monitoring or surveillance whilst you are doing your job?*

aware to a great extent / aware to a reasonable extent / aware to some extent / not aware at all

104. *If CODE 1, 2 OR 3: What form does this take?*

105. *How, in your judgement, has the level of monitoring and surveillance of your work changed over the past five years?*

increased greatly / increased a fair amount / increased a little / no change / decreased a little / decreased a fair amount / decreased greatly

106. *If increased / decreased: In what ways?*

107. *Do these forms of monitoring cause you to feel under pressure or stress?*

yes / no

108. *If yes: In what ways?*

109. *Apart from direct "over the shoulder" supervision, does management have any other means of monitoring your work performance and that of your work group?*

yes / no

110. *If yes: How this is done? And how often?*
111. *Do you feel under pressure from members of your own team to work in a particular way?*  
always / sometimes / rarely / never
112. *If CODE 1 OR 2: What form does this pressure take?*
113. *Do you feel under pressure from the technology on the production line to work in a particular way?*  
always / sometimes / rarely / never
114. *If CODE 1 OR 2: What form does this pressure take?*
115. *On the following scale - 1 greatly increased, 2 increased, 3 no effect, 4 decreased, 5 greatly decreased - could you say what effect new manufacturing technologies, as a specific issue, have had upon the following?*  
the variety of tasks in your job / your level of control over how to do your job / your level of skill / your level of responsibility / the effort required to perform your job / the amount of pressure you feel under whilst doing your job / your influence over quality / your level of job satisfaction
116. *How frequently do you feel under pressure or under stress at work?*  
constantly, during every day / very often / often / sometimes / rarely / never
117. *What forms does this pressure / stress take?*
118. *When it comes to disciplining employees, how strict do you feel management are today compared with five years ago?*  
more strict / less strict / little or no change
119. *On which of the following issues has management become more / less strict? (Scale: 1 more strict, 2 less strict, 3 no change)*  
absenteeism / persistent lateness / poor quality work / negative attitudes to work

#### Role of trade unions

120. *Are you a member of a trade union?*  
yes / no
121. *If yes: Which union is this?*
122. *If no: Why not? What advantage is there to be had by not being in a union?*
123. *Do you think that it would be beneficial if the company recognised a trade union?*  
yes / no
124. *If yes / no: Why is this?*
125. *If there was a trade union at the company, would you join?*  
yes / no
126. *If yes / no: Why?*
127. *Do you think the introduction of new working practices has made the union stronger / weaker / no change?*
128. *If CODE 1 OR 2: Why, and in what ways?*
129. *Do you think it has been or is an intention of management to use new working practices or employee involvement schemes to undermine the role of the union?*  
yes / no
130. *Why is this?*
131. *How significant a role do you think the trade union has played in determining the outcome of the changes in work organisation?*  
a very significant role / a fairly significant role / neither a significant nor an insignificant role / a fairly insignificant role / a very insignificant role

132. *If CODE 1 OR 2: What were the most important things that the union achieved?*
133. *If CODE 4 OR 5: Why was this?*
134. *In terms of influencing management at this company, where does the trade unions' influence come from? (Scale: 1 great deal of influence, 2 some influence, 3 little influence, 4 none at all)*
- individual union members within the plant / the union convenor at the plant / union reps within branches / the local branch of the union / the union at national level
135. *Have the changes in work organisation changed your attitude to the union in any way?*
- yes / no
136. *If yes: How?*
137. *How far, in your judgement, is the union successful in representing the interests of workers at the company?*
- very successful / successful / moderately successful / not very successful / unsuccessful
138. *Compared to five years ago, would you say the influence of the trade union is now far higher / somewhat higher / about the same / somewhat lower / far lower?*
139. *If CODE 1/2 OR 4/5: In what ways has the trade unions influence increased or decreased?*
140. *Of the following - 1 the union, 2 the management, 3 both of them, 4 yourself, 5 other (specify) - who is best at looking after your own interests in the following fields?*
- pay / job security / overtime / re-deployment between jobs / the way work is organised / the pace of work / the intensity of work

#### Pay and appraisal

141. *Do you feel that your pay is now more closely linked to your performance?*
- yes / no
142. *If yes: In what ways?*
143. *Do you feel that this will increase your job satisfaction?*
- yes / no
144. *If yes / no: Why is this?*
145. *To what extent are you motivated at work by pay?*
- a very large extent / a fairly large extent / to some extent / hardly at all
146. *Could you say what else motivates you at work? And are these other things a greater or a lesser motivation than pay?*
147. *How do you think your level of pay compares with other comparable firms? Would you say it is*
- a lot better than most / a bit better / about average / a little worse than average / a lot worse than average?
148. *What methods do management use for appraising your performance at work?*
149. *How satisfied are you with the way you are appraised?*
- very satisfied / fairly satisfied / not very satisfied / not at all satisfied
150. *If CODE 1 OR 2: Why are you satisfied?*
151. *If CODE 3 OR 4: Why is this?*